

Petals

by CN

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Summary: HamtaroxBijou... a twist... When these two are told that they're to be working together, putting their feelings aside for the sake of work is so much easier said than done. Throw in a couple of life changing twists, and you have an equation of utter doom

1. Tell Me You're Not Claustrophobic!

I know

I know! I know! This fic was supposed to be released after the completion of Chuujitsu, but I've been so busy these days that I've decided I won't have time to wait for Chuujitsu to be finished. So I guess that's good for all of you who have been wanting this fic to come out, right?

I've been planning this fic for a _very_ long time! hopefully, it'll be worth the wait.

A few notes: They're Ham-Human, meaning their humans with hamster ears. Not hamsters. Not humans. Ham-Humans.

Their ages? The gang is in their last year of college, so what would that make them? Roughly twenty-one? (You'll see why I had to make them so old later on!)

There will be OC's in this fic. Sorry! I know that OC's can be annoying sometimes (especially if a fic is loaded with them with virtually no signs of actual characters). But relax! I think you'll like the OC's since most of them have been in other Hamtaro fanfictions. And the scenes that the OC's will be in won't take over the story. This is a Hamtaro and Bijou fic; the story will revolve around them most of the time.

And before most of you repel yourselves at the thought of a Hamtaro and Bijou fic, (seriously, what happened to all the good Hamijou fics? This couple is like nonexistent.) just know that this fic isn't

the average love story. To see what I mean, you'll have to read the actual story which you probably are having trouble with since I'm making the author's note so long!

So here you go!

****CN****

****Petals****

****Chapter One:** _Tell Me You're Not Claustrophobic!_**

*** * ***

><p>The Ham-Human Bijou walked out of the cafeteria in an angered rage. The fact that Hamtaro had just made a joke out of asking her out was stinging in her mind. Of all the humiliating things that creature had put her through, this definitely had to be one of the worst.<p>

She had just finished her literature midterm (and mind you, these university midterms weren't exactly a walk in the park) and since she had skipped breakfast, she decided to get a midmorning snack in the cafeteria. That's when that cocky, good-for-absolutely-nothing, pompous, stubborn jerk named Hamtaro came up to her and decided to tick her off.

I hate Hamtaro, she kept repeating in her mind as she walked along the grassy fields of her school's campus.

He was the same boy who would purposely spill paste all over her dress in kindergarten, the same boy who would kick the back of her chair in third grade since he was seated so conveniently behind her, the same boy who would put rubber mice in her purse all throughout middle school, and the same boy who would lean against her locker in high school just so she would have trouble getting her books, often causing her to be late for class.

But today, just as she walked into the cafeteria, in front of the whole crowd of students who had chosen the cafeteria as a place to hangout that morning, he walked right up to her with that sickeningly overconfident smile of his and asked her out.

As soon as she heard the laughter of the rest of the students, she immediately did a 180 and marched straight out of the building. He could be so immature sometimes.

Her stomach grumbled. Cats, why did I choose to skip breakfast just to study for that midterm? She certainly wasn't going to go back inside to the cafeteria after what she had just faced. Since she couldn't eat, there was nothing for her to do for the next few hours. At Ham Sapien University, she had a very spread out schedule, meaning there were a lot of gaps where high school-ers and middle school-ers would have had classes. And since she only had two classes that day, she had a few hours to kill before her next and last class for the day. It was a perk of being a college kid.

But because she couldn't get anything to eat, Bijou's focus immediately shifted to the second thing she was supposed to be doing within those few hours: reviewing for her chemistry midterm.

Since she was a senior and her major was science, chemistry was her most important core class that year. This midterm was crucial for her to maintain the A she had in the class. She had to review before the midterm, for she knew that if it wasn't fresh in her head, her worry over the test would cause her to forget everything she had studied.

She sat down on a bench and started rummaging through her bag for her chemistry textbook. "Where are you, you stupid book?" she asked when she realized that the book wasn't anywhere to be seen.

She reviewed her steps from that morning: she got up, took a shower, brushed her hair, studied for the lit midterm, put her chemistry books on the kitchen counter--

Bijou cursed under her breath. She would have to drive back home to the small house she shared with Sandy and Pashmina, get the books, and then drive all the way back to the university. Bijou groaned as she started walking to the student parking lot, and just as she reached the entrance to the lot, she realized that she hadn't driven to school that morning. She had taken the bus.

Last night, Sandy got a call that her grandmother was in the hospital, so she borrowed Bijou's car to go visit her grandmother since neither Sandy nor Pashmina had a car of their own.

It was a twenty minute drive from her house to the university.

That meant it would take at least an hour to walk home.

And since she read the bus charts last night to see when she had to take it this morning, she knew no buses were running at this time that would take her home.

"Lovely," Bijou hummed sarcastically as she started to walk.

* * *

><p>She had been walking for about ten minutes and had only made it to the nearby park. What was worse was that a few gray clouds had started to spread across the sky, heightening Bijou's anxiety.<p>

A strong wind blew in her face and caused her hair to go all over her face. As she started fixing it, she felt water all over herself and realized that it had already started raining.

"Could this day get any worse?" she asked desperately as she rummaged once again through her bag to see if she had anything to cover herself with.

"On the contrary, I've been having a great day, Bij," an annoyingly familiar voice answered.

Bijou turned around. "Don't call me 'Bij', Hamtaro," she said sternly, noticing the bright orange umbrella he had over his head.

Hamtaro walked up to her. "Someone sounds a bit grumpy. What's the matter, aren't you enjoying your walk?" he asked, poking his umbrella

to her face and then taking it away.

"I'm not going for a walk, you jerk." And she quickly turned around and started walking again, groaning as she felt more raindrops hit her.

"Apparently," Hamtaro responded as he started walking with her. "You should really watch the weather reports. You would've known about the rain, and maybe you would've been prepared. Little Miss Heiress can't afford an umbrella?(1)"

"I'm always prepared," Bijou explained. "I keep an umbrella in my car at all times, but I lent my car to my friend because that's what friends do, not that you would know anything about having friends." Bijou swiftly looked Hamtaro up and down. "And I don't exactly see you with a pair of wheels either."

"It's being fixed," he replied shortly. "I got a ride to school this morning."

"Whatever." Bijou started walking faster, but suddenly she realized something the same time Hamtaro did.

"Aren't you in my chemistry class?" the two of them asked at the same time.

They looked at each other oddly. "Yeahâ€¦|Do you have your books with you?" they asked, once again speaking at the same time.

Hamtaro looked at Bijou. "You forgot your chem stuff at home, too?"

Bijou nodded. "I have to walk all the way home and get it," she said.

"Me too." All of a sudden, a light flashed in Hamtaro's eyes. "Don't you live on Grammercy Road? Stan told me his sister shares a house with you there."

Bijou nodded again. "Why do you care?"

"Because, you only live two streets away from me, Stan, Boss's and Oxnard's apartment, and what if I said that I knew a shortcut?" Hamtaro asked, eyebrows raised.

"I'd never go anywhere with you," she told him as she shook her head. "You have to know me better than that. I'll find a taxi or somethingâ€¦|"

"Good luck trying to get one. There's going to be a thunderstorm in about an hour; no taxi's going to drive in that weather," Hamtaro explained.

"Thunderstorm?" Bijou asked meekly. She then shook her head gain. "I don't care. Anything but you."

"Fine," he simply said. "Enjoy the rain." Hamtaro walked past her, leaving her to "enjoy the rain" that was simply getting stronger.

Rolling her eyes, Bijou cried, "Wait!" and ran up to him.

"I knew you'd come," Hamtaro told her as the two Ham-Humans started walking together. "So what did you think of the lit midterm?" he asked, shifting the umbrella so some of it covered Bijou's hair.

"It was easy, I guess," Bijou explained as she got under the shade of the umbrella. It was then that Bijou remembered Hamtaro was in her lit class. And come to think of it, he was in her history class, her philosophy class, and last year he had been in all her classes, and it was the same in high school, middle school, elementary school and they even went to the same preschool, which was around the time she had moved from France to Japan.

"We're always in the same classes," she said in a somewhat repulsed tone.

"Yeah. Aren't you the lucky one?" he asked condescendingly.

Bijou couldn't help but roll her eyes. "Not the words I would useâ€|"

Moments later, Hamtaro and Bijou reached a hole in the ground that was covered with a wooden board. Hamtaro stopped walking and looked excitedly at the hole. Bijou followed Hamtaro's gaze and seemed confused.

"This is your shortcut?" She asked him.

"Trust me," Hamtaro told her as he lifted the board off of the hole.

"Forgive me if I have trouble doing so." She watched as Hamtaro jumped into the hole. "What are you doing?"

"Come in," Hamtaro ordered as he held his hand up to help her down. Bijou looked around nervously and wondered if what she was doing was safe, but she nevertheless took his hand and jumped into the incredibly deep hole. As soon as she got a look around the hole, she realized where she was.

It was like being in an incredibly comfy cave. Although she was in a big hole, there was furniture such as small tables and chairs all around the room. There was even a mini fridge in the corner. Soft lighting surrounded the room.

"Impressive," Bijou told Hamtaro.

"You like?" he asked, deliberately making his voice sound more arrogant.

"I once heard Stan tell Sandy that he hung out in an underground clubhouse, but I never believed him," Bijou explained. "How'd you get the furniture through the hole? And how is there electricity in here?"

"You're forgetting why I brought you here," Hamtaro reminded. He pointed to a door that was carved out of dirt. It was at the other end of the room. "That's an underground tunnel that will take us back home in at least half the time it would have taken

normally."

Hamtaro grabbed Bijou's hand and took her into the tunnel. Instead of taking her hand away, Bijou grabbed Hamtaro's hand tighter as she noticed how tight the tunnel was. There was exactly enough room for the two of them to walk compactly. Despite the width, however, the tunnel's height doubled Bijou's height.

The two of them walked for while through the tunnel as they heard the rain hit the ground above them. In certain areas of the tunnel, there were leaks where tiny drops of water came through, leaving Bijou to wonder about how protected this tunnel was.

"Boss tells us not to go in the clubhouse when it's raining, especially not in the tunnel, since he claims there are cave-ins when it rains too hard," Hamtaro said, attempting small talk.

"What?" Bijou cried, yanking her hand away from his, which she had been holding all this time. "Then why did you bring me in here?" Her voice was audibly becoming more panicky.

"Relax," Hamtaro told her. "I've never seen a cave-in."

"That doesn't mean there haven't been any."

Bijou couldn't help but feel frightened, but she continued to follow Hamtaro through the tunnel anyway. What choice did she have? She certainly did not want to go outside and face the thunderstorm.

It was a few moments later that Bijou started speaking.

"Thanks, Hamtaro," she mumbled, causing Hamtaro to smile. Just as Hamtaro was about to comment, Bijou heard a snap and she looked up to the roof of the cave.

"What?" Hamtaro asked, looking up curiously.

"Nothing," Bijou quickly supplied. "Just my imagination."

"You know, I never thought I'd ever hear those words coming from you. Thank you, I mean," And as he said those words, Bijou could just feel his ego inflating more.

"Don't make more out of this situation thanâ€¦|" Bijou trailed off. She heard a strange noise, and this time, Hamtaro heard it too. Their large Ham-Human ears started wiggling as they tried to zero in on the noise.

It was a strange rumbling sound, and at first it was soft, like a bee's buzzing. But in a matter of seconds, the noise felt like someone was blowing a hairdryer in their ears.

"What's going on-" Bijou started to say, but she didn't have a chance to finish. Hamtaro had seen a few grains of dirt fall onto Bijou's head, and as soon as he had noticed them, he pulled Bijou towards him. Unfortunately, pulling Bijou towards him so quickly caused Bijou to fall on top of him, but the two Ham-Humans didn't care about that at the moment.

The exact spot where Bijou had been standing, the roof of the cave

collapsed, just missing the spot where Bijou was lying on top of Hamtaro by a foot.

"Cats," Hamtaro cursed as dust covered the area. He looked and saw Bijou on top of him, her face as white as her hair.

"A little help, please?" he asked, trying to hide the nervous strains in his voice. Bijou quickly got off of him and helped him to his feet. Bijou dusted herself off and looked at the nearly 300 pounds of dirt that had just fallen, blocking their way completely. Now their only way out was the way they came in.

Bijou looked at Hamtaro sharply. "'Relax, I've never seen a cave-in!'" she mocked as she hit the boy's shoulder. "We could have been killed, and then we would have missed our chemistry midterm!"

"But we weren't killed, and if it wasn't for me that cave-in would've happened on you," Hamtaro explained. "I saved your life."

"If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be down here in the first place," Bijou reminded. She looked once more at the mound that resulted from the cave-in.

"Well, obviously we can't go out this way," Bijou said as she stared at the pile which went all the way up to the roof of the cave, making it at least twice her height. She turned around and started to leave the way she came in. Hamtaro followed suit.

"We've got to get out of here," Bijou said quickly as she started to go towards the entrance of the tunnel, Hamtaro at her heels.

"It sounds like it's raining really hard now," Hamtaro said softly as he listened to the pounding water on top of their heads. Bijou nodded to this, and that's when they heard the second eruption.

The two Ham-Humans looked at each other nervously. They picked up their paces, dreading what could have caused the noise of that second eruption, and seconds later, they found the sight of the second cave-in.

This cave-in was like the first one: massive. It had also blocked their way completely, leaving Hamtaro and Bijou inside a cave where they were trapped by two cave-ins.

Hamtaro looked at the pile of dirt unbelievably while Bijou gasped.

"We're stuck," Bijou said nervously as she started to bite her nails.

"Not necessarily," Hamtaro reminded, but he knew as he looked at the mound of dirt that she was pretty much right.

Hamtaro kicked the pile of dirt, but it was no use. He had barely dented the mound.

"It's gonna take at least a few hours to remove all that dirt," Bijou estimated.

"Well, we don't need to remove it allâ€¦We just need to remove enough so that we can crawl over the dirt," Hamtaro explained.

"How long do you think that will take?" Bijou asked nervously. Was it suddenly getting much hotter in here?

"Maybe a couple of hoursâ€¦"

"Really?" Bijou asked in an extremely distressed voice. She started to fan herself with her hand. "Thatâ€¦long?" Her breathing was becoming shallow.

"What's wrong, Bijou?" Hamtaro asked nervously. Even though the cave wasn't the brightest place, he could tell that she was starting to sweat.

"Nothing!" she exclaimed. "It's justâ€¦thatâ€¦smallâ€¦this cave'sâ€¦so small. Very smallâ€¦thinâ€¦darkâ€¦smallâ€¦tinyâ€¦minisculeâ€¦" She started to pace slightly.

"Bijou, tell me you're not claustrophobic!" Hamtaro ordered.

"Don'tâ€¦be sillyâ€¦" But as if on cue, the moment she said those words, she stopped pacing, her eyes closed, and she started to fall. Luckily, Hamtaro moved just in time to catch her. Her sudden weight caused him to stumble slightly, so he took the fainted girl and sat against one of the cave's wall.

It was then that he was reminded of the chemistry midtermâ€¦

Hamtaro gritted his teeth as he looked at Bijou.

"Lovely," Hamtaro hummed sarcastically.

* * *

><p>It was a few hours later that Hamtaro awoke to a soft ringing. He quickly opened his eyes and realized that Bijou was still fainted and resting in his lap. He had to maneuver his hands around her body to get his cell phone out of his pant pocket, but as soon as he got a hold of it, he swung open the phone and cried, "Hello?"<p>

"Finally! I've been calling you for hours," Boss's voice was heard on the other end. "You missed the chemistry midterm."

Hamtaro cursed. "Sorry, I guess I dozed off. Unfortunately, that's the least of my problems."

"Why?" Boss asked. "Where are you, anyway?"

"In the clubhouseâ€¦" Hamtaro trailed off. "â€¦tunnelâ€¦"

"WHAT?!" Hamtaro knew that Boss's face was about as red as a tomato. "You know I told you NEVER to go in there when it was RAINING!! There's a THUNDERSTORM outside RIGHT NOW!!"

"Relax," Hamtaro chuckled nervously.

"So there wasn't a cave-in?"

"No!" Hamtaro mumbled quietly.

"At least you're alright-"

"there were two," Hamtaro said. Boss erupted in an explosion of threats to Hamtaro, all of which Hamtaro heard very clearly even when he pulled the phone as far away from his ears as his outstretched hand would allow.

"So you're stuck?" Boss asked when he settled down.

"Yes."

Boss could practically be heard rolling his eyes in anger over the telephone.

"But look at the bright side: we're alright!" Hamtaro said.

"There's someone in there with you?"

"Yeah! Bijou!" Hamtaro heard Boss snicker.

"You're stuck in a cave with her and you're complaining?" Boss asked slyly.

"Shut up! She's fainted, anyway," Hamtaro said. "Now call for help or something. Another cave-in could come at any minute."

"Ok, but stay calm," Boss told him. "The last thing you need is to panic."

"Right. I have a fainted girl in my arms and the two of us are stuck in an underground tunnel but I'm supposed to not panic," Hamtaro analyzed, knowing that staying calm was anything but easy.

* * *

><p>Ok!so what did you think?<p>

Good? Bad? Must be deleted immediately?

You'll find out what I made Bijou the heiress of later in the story. It has a slightly significant part in the later chapters.

And everything mentioned in the first chapter, from their science majors to Bijou's sudden fear of the word "thunderstorm" (did anyone catch that, by the way?) is crucial to the storyline. In that case, the whole first chapter is a foreshadowing of everything that will occur in the later chapters of this story.

Most of you are probably thinking, "I don't get what she's so excited about. It seems like an ordinary hate to love relationship fic. Yawn."

Well, if you're thinking that, you're wrong! You'll just have to read and see why this isn't the average love story (especially not for a section like Hamtaro).

Next chapter: A somewhat familiar OC makes an appearance andâ€|you'll see!

Review, please! I'd love the feedback, especially for this fic that I've been working so hard on.

-CN

2. Sleeping Loser Buttface who Snores a Lot

I'd like to thank those of you who reviewed, but first, the story!
Oh, and by the way, I don't own
Hamtaro.

****CN****

****Petals****

****Chapter Two: **_The_ _Sleeping Loser Buttface who Snores a Lot**

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* * *

><p>"Listen," Boss told Hamtaro, trying to keep his voice as calm as possible since he knew Hamtaro was becoming very agitated. "I took a class in first aid."<p>

"Good for you," Hamtaro replied acidly, although he knew he should have been is aâ€|nicer disposition. After all, Boss _had_ warned him time after time that going into the tunnels when it rained was a bad idea. So what right did he, Hamtaro, have to be mad at the one person who had explicitly warned him and the one person he had contact with from the "outside"?

"Keep Bijou warm." Boss had to make his sentences terse in order for him to keep his own anger in check.

Hamtaro looked at the girl still lying in his lap. She was breathing softly and had the utmost look of sincerity gracing her features.

She certainly looked very peaceful.

Damn her.

He glanced at his cell's clock and realized the sun must have already set.

"When can you get here?"

"To get you out will require a bit of man power. I'll wait till Stan comes home and then we'll try to dig you out of there."

"What about Oxy? Can't the two of you come right now?"

"Would _you_ trust Oxnard with a shovel?"

Hamtaro sighed. "Just get here soon."

He had put her far away from him, or at least as far as the small tunnel would allow, across the cave. He was even decent enough to put his jacket over her to keep her warm, and he had to wonder if she would do the same for him.

He desperately wished Ribon was awake. Therefore, he wouldn't be bored out of his mind while he drove her mad. That always gave him a sense of justice.

She was an heiress, and not just any stupid heiress—she was apparently the heiress of Ribon Jewelers, the biggest name of jewel-suppliers in Europe. She was apparently the gem of the Parisian paparazzo's eyes. Gem. How fitting.

She had had everything given to her on a silver platter, whereas Hamtaro had to work for everything he had managed to achieve.

She probably had tutors for every subject, and he had to stay up till 3 in the morning studying for a test the next day.

She probably had her mommy donate a whole wing to Ham Sapien University to get in, and he struggled to perfect his grades just so he could be considered for admission.

Why was she a science major, again? Wasn't she eventually going to run Ribon Jewelers one day?

A wind swept through a tiny hole in the tunnel's roof, causing goosebumps all over Hamtaro's arms.

She's pretty decent once you get to know her, Stan had told him after he went off on a rant over how easy heiresses could have it.

"Yeah, right."

* * *

><p>Cats—her head was throbbing as she opened her eyes quickly. The pain caused her to slowly lift herself up and feeling the weight of a large jacket over her, she looked at her surroundings. Dark—so very dark, but the smell of wet grass and the floor of dirt under her was apparent everywhere. Her chest went up-and-down ferociously as her breathing became panting her sweat started to dab at her forehead and clam up her palms.<p>

Hamtaro was the only person with her in this tiny little hole, and this was perhaps the most unnerving thing about the whole scenario. His chest moved softly as he slept, and he said something in his slumber but it was too quiet for Bijou to hear over her own breathing. Then he spoke again. "Ribon" was clearly the word, and it served as some sort of realization for he jolted up from his sleep, worry flashing in his cobalt eyes.

"Oh—you're alright." His breathing started to slow down as he spotted her across from him. "I was really worried—er—I mean you fainted. Are you ok?" He was truly amazing. He managed to change his voice from relieved to embarrassed to gruff all in one breath.

Flashbacks of the day were coming back to her—the cafeteria—the chemistry midterm—the stupid tunnel which wasn't stable during rainstorms—the cave-ins—Fainting.

"Are you starting to panic again?" the worry reappeared in his voice. "Quickly! Put your head between your legs!"

Bijou did as she was told. Although the sensation of blood rushing to her head was horribly unpleasant, she still had her consciousness.

"I just remembered it all," Bijou said, head still in between her legs.

"Hmm?" Hamtaro asked in a clearly uninterested voice. "What did you remember?"

"You—in the cafeteria, asking me out in front of everybody. Why did you do that? It was really humiliating"

"Well, Ribon," he said with the smallest of smirks, "that was kinda the idea."

Although he would never admit it, that quiet yet defiant "no" was one that he had been expecting, the rejection still felt horrible.

"Rejecting someone is an awful thing to do, even if it is a jackass like you, Haruna." Her head was now up again, and though it was pretty dark in the cave, her face was clearly red as a beet, her emerald eyes sharp and her white hair splattered all over her face. She reminded Hamtaro of an inverse Santa Clause—sort of—

"Yeah, I was sort of expecting it. It didn't hurt."

"Oh, I'm sure it didn't," she said dryly. She stood up and stretched herself. When she finally sat back down, she picked up his jacket and tossed it over to him. "I mean, girls must reject you all the time."

Hamtaro simply let out something along the lines of a growl as he himself started to get up and move around.

"No comeback?" Bijou asked innocently as she started to dig through her bag.

"You're pushing it, Ribon," he snapped at her. That's gratitude for him.

She looked up from her bag, a cell phone in her hands and sparkles in her eyes.

"_Merci_," she said swiftly, causing Hamtaro to roll his eyes.

She realized that she had several missed calls and cursed aloud. She quickly dialed the number that had called her many times.

"Hello?"

"Pashy!" Bijou cried, unable to hide the excitement in her voice. This just made Hamtaro imitate her by mouthing what seemed like an extremely high-pitched voice and flipping imaginary hair away from his shoulders.

"Bijou, where _are you_? You have no idea how worried I was. I was _this_ close to calling the policeâ€|No one's seen you since the lit midterm and theâ€|cafeteria thingâ€|"

"â€|You heard about that?"

"â€|Hehâ€|the whole campus has heard of it. But seriously, where are youâ€|"Oh wait, Sandy just pulled in with your carâ€|and I think Stan's with her, too."

"Good," Bijou replied. "Get in my car, ohâ€|"and bring a shovel."

"A shovel? Cats, Bij, where are you?"

"Stay on the phone. I'll explain on the way there."

* * *

><p>An hour or two had passed, and the two Ham-Humans were furiously dialing numbers on their phones. Hamtaro out of sheer frustration for where Boss had been, and Bijou in anger after Pashmina hung up when their connection was becoming weak, despite Bijou's protests to stay on the line.<p>

"Dammit, Boss! Where are you?"

"_Zut! Mes amis, oÃ¹ Ã^ates-vous_?"

It was a few moments later that their friends had called, explaining that the thunderstorm had left many main roads and highways blocked and that there were police cars everywhere, warning people to stay off the roads.

"Listen up, Hamtaro, I don't want you to panicâ€|"

"Bijou, just stay calm because this might be difficult to takeâ€|"

"What?!" Hamtaro and Bijou asked eagerly into their phones.

"The traffic's pretty uglyâ€|"

"All the streets have been flooded, Bijâ€|"

"And?" Hamtaro and Bijou asked their friends in desperation, hoping with every figment in their bodies that they wouldn't sayâ€|

"You might have to stay the nightâ€|"

"You probably will end up spending the nightâ€|"

Hamtaro and Bijou looked up simultaneously at each other, wondering if it was all a really, really bad dreamâ€|

â€|or some cruel twist in an already hopeless situation.

* * *

><p>They had waited another hour for any word from their friends, but unfortunately, the situation was just as desperate as ever before.<p>

Bijou had given up all hope of leaving before tomorrow morning. She placed her head against the dirt wall of the cave and slowly drifted off to sleep. Hamtaro, not feeling the slightest bit sleepy, simply watched her body as it moved up and down with the girl's gentle breathing.

He watched her for Cats know how long, and without noticing it, he had fallen asleep himself, only to wake up presumably hours later to see that she was still asleep. No, wait. She had to have waken up, for her shoes were kicked off, lying beside her and her tights had been taken off and placed into one of her shoes. The sleeves of her tidy, navy blue sweater were rolled up and the top few buttons of her blouse had been undone. Her always-present, neatly-tied ribbon was wrapped around her wrist and he noted that a new layer of white hair was messily framing her face, bangs fluttering like petals in the wind every time she breathed.

Hamtaro glanced at his cell phone. 1 A.M. It was impossible to believe. Boss, Stan (Or was he still with Sandy and Pashmina?) and Oxnard had probably given up hope for the night and abandoned him here.

Hamtaro awoke some time later to find Bijou awake, a few bobby pins between her lips and her ribbon being crafted into her hair as she used her open cell phone's backlight so that she could use her compact mirror efficiently. Hamtaro laughed at the girl's silliness. Her sweater was still dirty with clumps of dirt being evident here and there, her blouse had still been undone and her shoes were still kicked off and lay beside her. But what did he know?

"Well," she said with a small smile after the last bobby pin had been placed into her cloud white hair, "Sleeping Beauty finally awakes."

Hamtaro gave the girl an indignant scowl.

"I could say the same about you. Every time I was awake, you were asleep!"

Bijou's smile only got bigger.

"So, you think I'm beautiful, hmm?" Hamtaro simply rolled his eyes yet again.

"If beautiful serves as a synonym for purely infuriating, then yes, of course," he replied, having to force a smile back to her unwavering glare.

"Actually, I take that back. You are not Sleeping Beauty. You're the Sleeping Loser Buttface who Snores a Lot."

"I do not snore a lot."

"Did you ever listen you yourself while you slept?"

"Well, noâ€|butâ€|"

"Well then?" Bijou turned around, once again fidgeting with the ribbon in her hair.

"What are you doing now?" Hamtaro asked, completely enraged at the fact that this girl was willing to test the patience of a saint.

"Forgive me, but I have a sense of needing to do something instead of feeling completely useless," She snapped back, placing bobby pins between her lips. After she had checked her mirror to make sure her hair looked fine, she sighed and stared along the caves dark walls.

"Do you think there'll be another one?" her voice was quiet, subduedâ€|not like her, and this led Hamtaro to believe that she truly was frightened.

"Well," he replied in a calm voice, trying to keep the moment's peace level at ease, "there hasn't been one in a while, so I'm guessing we're safe."

Bijou let out a breath of relief, and Hamtaro couldn't believe that she actually trusted him in this situation. How did he know if there was going to be another cave-in?

I guess fear does that to people.

Just as Bijou closed her eyes, Hamtaro's mouth twisted into an evil, this-is-gonna-be-fun kind of smirk.

"I'm surprised you can sleep, even withâ€|" he trailed off mysteriously, leaving Bijou to want to know what he was about to say.

"Even with what?" she asked, her tired voice still showing signs of interest, with her eyes still closed.

"Wellâ€|nothing, it's not important."

Bijou opened her eyes for a brief moment. "Well, coming from you, I'm sure it wasn't." She let out a small yawn and closed her eyes.

Hamtaro's little smirk faded. She was supposed to be interested. "I'm surprised, _Bij_, I don't know many girls who can sleep knowing that there are bugs everywhere."

"I told you not to call me 'Bij'." She paused for a brief moment, as if to adjust the sound of her own voice. "And aside from you, there are no bugs around."

"Well of course there are! This is a cave, isn't it? But don't worry, all the bugs that _have_ _approached_ you, I took off while you were sleeping."

Her eyes were sharply opened now. "There were no bugs crawling on me. I would've felt them."

"Obviously not. This one centipede was halfway up your leg before I peeled the little sucker off!"

"You're such a liar." Despite what Bijou just said, she pulled her legs up to her body and decided that she wasn't that tired after all.

"_Mon dieu! _The chem. midterm," Bijou spoke aloud just as she realized that she had missed it.

Hamtaro closed his eyes and cringed. He had forgotten that he missed it. "I'd rather take my chances in this cave with you then take that thing."

About an hour later, Hamtaro was the one dozing off and Bijou was left shaking her head.

"I'm surprised you can sleep, Hamtaro, because I, like you, don't know many _girls_ who can sleep knowing that there are bugs everywhere." She smiled inwardly to herself.

Just as her smile started to fade, she heard the ever-so familiar sound of dirt falling. Her eyes grew with fear as she reached over and shook her cave-mate.

"W-what? Where's the earthquake? I _knew_ the world would end in 2006!" Hamtaro asked as he jolted upwards.

"No, you dolt, I think there's going to be another cave-in," Bijou whispered. She was already standing up and pacing the cave carefully.

Hamtaro wiggled his Ham-Human ears and indeed, he could very precisely make out the sound of dirt falling. Where was the sound coming from? He looked to the roof of the tunnel and there didn't seem to be dirt falling from there. He then turned to the mound of dirt that had been formed by the last cave-in.

"Wait," Hamtaro said, standing up to examine the dirt mound. "I thinkâ€¦Boss!"

"Heke?" Bijou turned to the dirt mound and stood beside Hamtaro.

"Listen," he said, "you can hear the sound of the shovel going against the dirt. Boss? Is that you! Stan? Oxy?"

A large hole was punched into the dirt mound using the shovel. The huge projection of dirt that, well, projected due to said punch caused Hamtaro and Bijou to move back and cover their faces.

"How come you assumed that it _had_ to be one of the guys that got you out of here?" A feminine and certainly not Boss, Stan or Oxnard's voice responded as her large eyes poked through the hole she had just made with her shovel.

Bijou gasped in excitement and ran up to the dirt mound while Hamtaro

rolled his eyes for like the fourth time. _Stupid Heiresses._

"Crystal!" Bijou squealed as another punch was given to the dirt mound thanks to the brown-haired heiress. "What are you doing back here?"

Crystal Victoria Donaldson. The heiress to the Donaldson Botanical Gardens, supposedly the most beautiful display of all things green in the whole entire world. The very reason, Hamtaro believed, Stan even put up with Sandy and her petulant little girl friends. Although, Hamtaro had to admit, out of the two heiresses he knew, Crystal had to be the far more approachable one. There was just something about her that made Hamtaro go, "Nah, I won't spill paste on her dress today." The two (meaning Hamtaro and Crystal) were actually pretty close. She was currently studying business and finance at one of Kyoto's finest universities, and even Hamtaro had to wonder why she was back.

"Well," Crystal started to explain, "Pashy called and explained that she hadn't heard from you in hours, and I thought since I finished all my midterms and had no major plans tonight, why not hop one of Daddy's jets to help find you. It's good to see you, Bijou."

"You're so sweet, Crys, but you didn't have to do all that. I really wasn't missing. I was just stuck here with one of the world's biggest jerkfaces," Bijou explained.

"When did you get here?" Bijou asked.

"Just about two hours ago, and let me tell you, I'm never driving an airport rental car again. They're so slow! From now on, I'm gonna have one of daddy's chauffeurs come pick me up."

"_Bien sur!_ I know exactly what you're talking about. Every time I go traveling, I make sure that a driver is sent from â€" Bijou was interrupted by Hamtaro clearing his throat rather loudly.

"Getting back to rescuing us, where are Boss and Oxnard and Stan?" Hamtaro asked the girl, pushing Bijou out of the way.

"Hello to you, too, Hamtaro. Stan came with Pashy and Sandy; they're waiting with Boss and Oxnard outside of this cave thingy that you call a Clubhouse," Crystal explained.

"How come they're not the ones shoveling?" Hamtaro asked indignantly.

"Because they were too dense to bring shovels," the botanical garden heiress replied. This just caused Bijou to laugh and Hamtaro to fall over anime style. "And I thought it was a nice surprise. Besides, Sandy and Pashmina are like hyperventilating up there in worry over you, so, yeahâ€|"

About an hour later, Boss returned with a shovel and started to help Crystal dig Hamtaro and Bijou out, and eventually, there was a hole big enough for Hamtaro and Bijou to step over.

"Cats, I love you!" Bijou exclaimed as she jumped over the dirt and into Crystal's arms.

"You're not gonna hug me, are you?" Boss asked wearily as Hamtaro stepped over the dirt mound. Hamtaro was just happy to be out of the stupid hole.

"Oww!" Hamtaro cried after Boss had punched him on the shoulder.

"I told you to stay out of the tunnels when it was raining," Boss said, which just caused Hamtaro to chase him all the way out of the Clubhouse.

Bijou sighed as she started walking with Crystal out of the Clubhouse. "I'll tell you, it's not fun being stuck with Hamtaro Haruna. I can't see why you're friends with him."

"He's actually pretty decent once you get to know him," the other girl replied.

"Yeah, right." Bijou glanced at her cell phone. "School starts in a few hours, and I have to make-up a stupid chem midterm."

"Come on. You can worry about that later. Right now, you're going home with Pashy and Sandy and you're going to take a nice, long shower."

Bijou leaned her head against her friend's shoulder. "That sounds _so_ nice."

Once they were outside, Bijou saw three cars parked outside. One was Boss's, in which Oxnard, Stan and Boss were sitting while Hamtaro ranted to them, "How could you not have thought to bring a shovel?" The other car was Crystal's, since it had the airport rental logo on the windshield, and the last car was Bijou's little blue one, on which Pashmina and Sandy had been leaning against. They immediately perked up at the sight of Bijou.

"Bij!" they exclaimed as they took the white-haired girl into their arms.

"You have no idea how worried I was," Pashmina started to say. Bijou could see tearstains all over her face.

"Yeah, like, the next time you decide to get stuck in a cave for a few hours, give us a call, 'k?" Sandy said as she stroked her friend's face, and Bijou could tell by her voice that she had been crying.

"I'm fine, but I appreciate your worry. And how's your grandmother?" She asked Sandy, who just smiled in return and grabbed her friend even harder.

"She's fine. You're fine. It's all good."

Moments later, Bijou, Pashmina and Sandy were all gathered into Bijou's car (though Pashmina was driving since Bijou looked way too tired), and they honked their horn at Crystal, who happened to be talking with Hamtaro.

'_I wonder what that's all about,'_ Bijou couldn't help but think.

"Are you coming, Crys? You're welcome to stay the night at our house," Sandy called over. To this, Crystal just turned her head and nodded over her shoulder before returning to her conversation with Hamtaro.

* * *

><p>"I don't think you should go to school today, Bij," Sandy said as Bijou walked out of the bathroom in a powder blue bathrobe.<p>

"Yeah, you've been through a lot today," Pashmina agreed, patting a seat beside her on the couch.

"I have to, guys, I have to speak with my chem. teacher about making up that midterm," Bijou rationalized with a very drowsy voice. Her head practically fell over onto the couch.

"I guess you can have her room tonight, Crys," Pashmina said with a smile to Crystal, who had been quiet throughout the conversation.

"Thanks, Pashy."

"Good. I'll go get a new comforter from the linen closet. Make that two, one for Bijou, of course. " And with that said, Pashmina went down the hall.

"Hey, you look tired, and I'm in the mood for something nice and hot. I'll go make us some nice, chamomile tea," and before Crystal could protest, Sandy was off into the kitchen, getting a kettle full of water ready.

Crystal just leaned across the recliner she had been sitting on. "I guess it's just you and me, Bij."

"Hey, Crys?" Bijou asked, startling Crystal.

"Bij! Go to sleep," Crystal ordered as she went over to the couch the jewel heiress was resting on.

"I will, I promise," Bijou said quietly, "but I want to know, what were you talking with Hamtaro about?"

"Well, he and I _are_ friendsâ€|"

"Yeah, but it seemed like you were talking about something serious," Bijou explained through a yawn.

"If you must know, then, I was going to talk about it to you anyway."

"Talk about what to me, Crys?" Bijou asked, sitting up and sounding more interested.

"Well, aside from finding out where you were, I had an â€|_ulterior_ motive for coming here."

* * *

><p>Well, here you go! The next chapter written and the OC I promised in here.<p>

And before any of you get worried, don't worry: I have full permission from all the Authors/Authoresses to use their characters.

And another thing, I got a bunch of hits for this story (roughly 300+), but only nine reviews, and I'm really sorry, but I need more reviews than that if that many people are reading this story. Sorry, I'm one of those people who can tend to be self-conscious about my writing and I need feedback to help me out.

So please, if you're reading, just review, or else this fic is scrapped.

And as a thank you for those of you that did review:

****AmyAddict1-****Thank you for the review! I don't know whether or not you'll be able to see what makes this story so unique just yet, but keep being patient! You'll see by the end of this fic what's so special.

****Cappyandpashy4ever-****Thanks for reviewing, and no kidding! Writing Hamtaro and Bijou as well, not friends, is pretty challenging, but I love a good writing challenge. And as for Panda's last name, well, I hadn't thought about that since Panda, unlike in "Chuujiitsu", will not have a major role in this story. I doubt his last name will even be mentioned, so let's see. If worse comes to worse, I'll make his last name Dapan or something. lol and yeah, Komachi won't come till later but her part is still significant.

****Crystalgurl101-****Oh, thank you so much for the sweet review! You really think the first chapter was gold? Well, hopefully you'll think this chapter is just as good. And I hope my playing out of Crystal in this chapter honored your writing of her. I read your other fics to try and keep her in character as much as possible, and I even let her end the chapter! Hopefully, this chapter made your day, too!

****Dbzgtfan2004-****Thanks for reviewing, and it's so nice to know that there's still a Hamtaro/Bijou fan out there.

****Huskie86-****Thanks for reviewing!

****Kaitlyn Takaishi-****Thanks for the review, and do Hamtaro and Bijou seriously remind you of a kid you know and yourself? That's pretty cool.

****Kerriberri-****Thanks for the review!

****X Lollipop X-****Thanks for reviewing, and I'm so glad that you found their personalities to be alright despite their "rivalry". That means a lot.

****XxFadingAwayXx-****Thanks for the review, and I'm really glad you liked my story so far!

See? For those of you who actually take the time to review, I try to do something nice in return and thank you. The longer your review, the more I reply back.

So please review!

And **_**HAPPY HOLIDAYS!!**_**

-CN

3. Like a Hurricane and Tornado in a Bottle

****CN****

****Petals****

****Chapter Three: **_Like a Hurricane and a Tornado In a Bottle**

>

* * *

><p>"Do you guys really want to know?"

"YES!!" Bijou, Sandy and Pashmina were about to fall over with suspense as they watched Crystal sip her drink, smirking that she knew something that they didn't.

It had been nearly half an hour since Crystal told Bijou that she was going to talk to her about something, an ulterior motive of some sorts, and since that moment, Bijou had been desperate to find out.

"Well then, you're going to have to keep guessing," Crystal said as she took one more sip, "Because I'm not telling."

"You have to tell me sooner or later," Bijou reminded as she crossed her hands over her bathrobed chest in frustration.

"Hmmmâ€¦let's think, ladies. What can Crystal possibly talk with Hamtaro about that also involves Bijou?" Pashmina mused as she leaned against the couch and slowly stirred her tea.

"What do Hamtaro and Bijou have in common?" Crystal suggested, giving them a huge hint. Bijou's response to this was simply to lower her eyes into slits and glare at Crystal.

"Absolutely nothing! He is a mean, obnoxious, _stupid_ jerk that I have the misfortune of going to school with!" she snapped as she turned her head around. Suddenly, she was reminded of something. "And do you know what he had the audacity to do to me in front of the whole cafeteria?"

"No, but it sounds interesting," Crystal responded. She placed her drink on the table and stared at the three other Ham-Humans.

"Oh, can I tell it?" Sandy asked excitedly. "Crys, it was like amazing! Hamtaro actually-"

"Amazing?" Bijou asked indignantly. "Whose side are you on, Sandy? And you weren't even at school today! How would you know?"

"News of something like this travels fast," Sandy said coolly.

"Something like this? Are you kidding me?" Bijou dropped her head in her hands and ran her fingers through her white hair.

Pashmina looked at Bijou and sighed. "Oh, lighten up, Bij. You probably would've found it funny if it happened to someone else."

"I don't find anything Hamtaro Haruna does 'funny'," Bijou retorted, head still in her hands.

"Will someone just tell me what happened?" Crystal asked. "You're keeping me in suspense here and I hate it." As soon as those words left her lips, Crystal wished she could take them back. Pashmina, Sandy and Bijou's lips formed smirks that mirrored the one Crystal had on just moments earlier.

"It seems that you know something we want to know and we know something you want to know," Sandy explained as her brilliant lime eyes sparkled with delight. "Care to make a trade?"

"Not really," Crystal said. "If it really was as amazing as you said it was, then I can ask anyone what happened. In fact," Crystal started to say as she grabbed her purse from the coffee table. "Maybe Stan can tell me." She flipped open her cell phone.

Bijou looked up and groaned. "Fine." Crystal snapped shut her phone and looked at Bijou expectantly.

"He asked me out," Bijou mumbled, her head turned away from the other girls. Crystal's eyes widened for a split second but then settled down.

"So?" She asked. "What's the big deal?"

"It was in front of the whole cafeteria, Crys, and he made a big scene out of it and everything," Pashmina explained.

"I still don't see what the big deal is."

"That's because you're friends with that creep, Crys," Bijou reminded. "And frankly, I still can't figure out why. I mean, you seem pretty smartâ€¦"

"What Bij means to say is that everyone knows Hamtaro and Bijou aren't on the friendliest terms and Hamtaro just wanted to mess with her." Sandy sighed and looked over at her friends with tired eyes.

"So what did you say?" Crystal asked eagerly.

"What do you think?" Bijou responded.

Crystal gasped. "This is so exciting! When's your first date?" To this, Bijou grabbed one of the decorative pillows and aimed it at the

girl. Crystal caught the pillow and just as she was about to throw it back, Sandy spoke.

"Are we ever gonna find out what you wanted to tell Bijou?" She asked.

"Yeah, don't think we forgot already," Pashmina chimed. "So come on! Spit it out!"

Crystal placed the pillow in her lap and squeezed it. "If you want to know that badlyâ€¦"

"**We** **do**!" The three other girls screamed in unison.

"Cats, guys, settle down. You'll wake up the neighbors."

"Crys-talllllllâ€¦" All hints of tiredness in Bijou's voice had long-been replaced with impatience.

"Kay, fine." Crystal sat up straight and pushed a few of her stray, brown strands away from her face. She took a deep breath and closed her eyes. Once she opened them, she looked at Bijou.

"Daddy gave me my first official job as CEO-to-be of the Donaldson Botanical Gardens," Crystal explained, never failing to state the name of her father's company.

"That's great, Crys," Bijou said, although she had to hide the disappointment in her voice. What did that have to do with her? Even Pashmina and Sandy, although they congratulated Crystal, seemed a little let down.

But Crystal wasn't done explainingâ€¦

"And, I'll have you know that this just happens to be one of the rare times I'm glad you took a science major instead of a Business one," Crystal continued. This caught Bijou's interest.

Ever since that day, almost four years ago, when the whole gang found out that Bijou was an heiress to Ribon Jewelers (she had purposefully kept it hidden), Crystal had been ecstatic. Bijou was one of her best friends, and now she was a fellow heiress.

However, that was after Bijou had already been accepted to Ham Sapien University as a science major. Unbeknownst to almost everyone, Bijou had also been accepted to The Sorbonne's Business and Finance school, and when this was discovered, Crystal was fuming.

"_You got into one of the best schools in the world under a business major and you chose Ham Sapien why?" _Crystal asked. _"You're an heiress. You have to take over Ribon Jewelers one dayâ€¦so why take a science major?"_

"_I don't knowâ€¦I think I like the science of how jewels form more than the business of how to make money off of them."_

"_Your mother told me that you will, one day, be the CEO. So just go to Sorbonne!"_

"_I _will_ take over, relax. But why not spend a few years of doing what I love before spending the rest of my life behind a desk?"_(1)

But now, Crystal was happy that Bijou took on a science major. Something was offâ€|

"Crystal," Bijou said tentatively, "what exactly does your father want you to do?"

Crystal smiled. "Well, you know the local Donaldson Botanical Garden?"

Sandy nodded. "Of course we do! That's your dad's first garden ever! The first of like how many?"

"Right," Crystal started to wring her hands nervously. "The fact is, our staff of botanists there was the staff working there since the garden was first builtâ€|"

"Then they must have been working there for around twenty years," Bijou thought aloud.

"Exactly. The time has come for them to retire."

"Crystalâ€|" Pashmina's eyes went wide with thought. "You're not asking Bijou to be a botanist, are you?"

Bijou looked up at Crystal. Crystal smiled widely at her good friend and nodded excitedly.

Bijou stood up and paced around the living room of the house she shared with Pashmina and Sandy. "A botanist for a Donaldson Gardenâ€|wowâ€|" she patted her lips with her finger. "It's kind of a surpriseâ€|"

Crystal stood up and walked over to her friend. "Oh come on! You're smart at science and you like it, too, for whatever unknown reason."

"But Crystal, I'm sure your dad would want someone with more experience, and I haven't even finished college yet! Are you sure you want me?"

Crystal went silent and looked anywhere but at Bijou. She wrung her hands nervously.

"What's wrong, Crys?" Pashmina asked.

"Crystal," Bijou started to say with a tone of seriousness curling in her voice. "I'm not exactly your first choice, am I?"

"What makes you think that?" Crystal asked sheepishly as her eyes shifted over to Bijou. Bijou gave Crystal the "you're-kidding-me-right?" look and Crystal broke down.

"Well, I've been really busy, that's all! I mean school is hectic, daddy wants me to spend all my free time with him in the office so that I get 'prior experience' and I don't have a moment to spare yet daddy still assigned me the job of finding a new botanist for the

gardens!"

"How long have you had this assignment?" Sandy asked as she and Pashmina stood up and walked over to the two heiresses.

"A few months. What?" Crystal asked after seeing the look the other three girls were giving her. "Listen, all of the other great botanists that I did research on are already taken by the other Donaldson Botanical Gardens. And besides, I already found another person for the role of the Head Botanist. All I need is another smart, science-loving person to work with my new Head Botanist."

"Is that why you were talking with Hamtaro? Do he and I have to compete for the job?" Bijou asked.

"Does that mean you're interested?" Crystal asked. Bijou gave Crystal another look. "Ok, fine, I told him about the job, too."

Bijou walked over to the couch and sat down. She, remaining ever so silent, poured herself a cup of the tea Sandy had made.

"Come on, Bij, what do you say?" Crystal asked as she sat down alongside Bijou.

"It's a great opportunity," Pashmina reminded.

"Yeah, I mean aren't the Donaldson Gardens also where all that research is done on like therapeutic herbs and scents and stuff?" Sandy asked.

"Yes, exactly! Bijou, come on, I was desperate to find somebody but now that I think about it, you'd be so perfect!" Bijou looked up from her tea. She looked as if she were about to say yes from her facial expression, but then something dawned on her.

"But Harunaâ€¦If he's going to work thereâ€¦" Bijou didn't need to finish.

"I don't want to choose between you and Hamtaro, Bij. I just wanted to keep my options open. There's an interview for the job in a few days. Hamtaro said he'll be there." Bijou bit her lips at Crystal's words. "Are you going to go?"

"So, all I have to do is show up at this interview?" Bijou asked.

"Well, my job was really just to find someone and tell them about this interview. One of daddy's assistants will make the final cut," Crystal explained.

"How many people have you told?" Bijou blew on her tea and looked back at Crystal.

"Just you and Hamtaro."

"So, in reality, all I have to do is make a better impression than him to get this job?"

Crystal nodded.

Bijou's face suddenly donned a bright smile. "Piece of cake." and she took a long sip of her tea.

* * *

><p>With a speedy 'thank-you' to Boss, Hamtaro raced out of his friend's car. As he ran through the southern parking lot of Ham Sopian University, he couldn't help but pray for his car to be fixed soon. It wasn't easy getting Boss to wake up early and drop him off here, but unfortunately for Boss, Hamtaro was persistent on coming early and he didn't have time to wait for a bus.<p>

Hamtaro had been up all night, thinking about Crystal's offer. It caused a warming sensation throughout his body, despite the crisp wind of this mid-October morning.

A botanist at one of the finest gardens in the nation, and all before he graduated college! It was such a rare opportunity, and he reminded himself to get Crystal something really nice for Christmasâ€|

As he finally approached the chemistry wing, he calmed himself. He didn't want to seem like an over-excited idiot. No, he had to look seriousâ€|

He was walking towards the main chemistry building when he noticed that the ground was still wet from yesterday's thunderstorm. Patches of large puddles lay here and there along the walkway, but he didn't care.

As he hopped over the puddles that got in his way and stared around himself, he also noticed that the rain had helped with the growth of the flowers that outlined the campus. Their precious, vibrant petals added the much needed splashes of color against the gray sky.

Hamtaro smiled despite himself. Crystal said he was the only person she had spoken to so far, and he felt himself getting excited all over again.

As he entered the building, that was all he could think about. He walked his way through the long halls and he noticed that he was humming. He decided to let this feeling of happiness stay for a little while. It was strange, though, for he never thought he would feel like a kid on Christmas just by being offered a job.

He recalled the previous night, listening in his underground tunnel as the rain pelted on. He never thought that what seemed like such a miserable night could end on such a happy note.

What he didn't realize was that all the way home last night, he had been smiling. Boss, Stan and Oxnard used his newly-attained happiness to tease him by making stupid remarks like, "Wow, you and Ribon must have really enjoyed spending time together last nightâ€|What _were_ you two doing?"

Hamtaro shook his head and ran his fingers through his orange and white hair. He adjusted his shirt and glanced himself over just to make sure he looked presentable. Cats knows how long he had to spend in the shower getting the smell of dirt off of him. He wondered if she had the same problem as well.

He tried to clear his mind and shook his head again. The last thing he wanted to do right now was get himself frustrated by thinking ofâ€|

"You," he snapped, eyes wide open, as he saw her at the end of the hallway, walking towards the same room he was walking to.

"Well, I can't say that I'm thrilled to see you, either," she snapped back as she pushed her white hair behind her shoulders.

She continued walking towards the door and with every step she took she gained an air of confidence. Hamtaro did the same, making his strides seem more powerful as he approached the door.

The way they approached each other, collecting more strength and potential danger the closer they got, was like a hurricane and a tornado in a bottle. Imminent chaos.

As she reached the door and started to pull on the knob, Hamtaro also grabbed the doorknob and tried to pry her fingers off of it.

"No way. I'm going in to talk to Professor Vivian first," he explained.

Bijou slapped his hand off of hers. "What gives you the right to do that?" she asked as she pulled on the knob with her other hand.

"Because I was here first," Hamtaro said as he pulled her other hand towards him. Her hand was pulled up to his chest and her face was brought up to his with this sudden movement. His eyes were sharpened as he tried to stare her down.

"How do you know that?" Bijou asked as she stared right back at his cobalt-blue gaze.

"I arrived here first, or does your memory span last all of 15 seconds?" Hamtaro responded, tightening his hold on her hand.

"If I remember correctly, we arrived here at the same time, idiot," Bijou reminded. "And I got to the doorknob first. I was about to go in when you so barbarically pulled me away, don't you remember? Or maybe you're the one with the memory lapse problem."

Hamtaro gritted his teeth. "You owe me. That cave-in could've killed you."

Bijou's expression flared. "I told you I owe you nothing! You lead me down into that stupid cave-"

"I offered, you came. You didn't have to."

"Hmph. It was pretty stupid of you to go down into that cave even when you knew it wasn't stable during thunderstorms."

"Well it's not like you had any bright ideas of your own, Ribon!"

"Here's a bright idea: Why don't the two of you get out of my doorway

so that I may enter my classroom, or am I intruding at a bad time?" a third voice interrupted just as Bijou was preparing to slap Hamtaro.

Hamtaro and Bijou looked at their chemistry professor and their eyes widened in surprise. Hamtaro immediately released Bijou and they mumbled their apologies as they stepped aside.

Professor Vivian took her key and unlocked the door. As she stepped inside, she gestured for the two Ham-Humans to follow her.

Hamtaro and Bijou both gave each other a sideways glare before, after some light pushing and shoving, the two managed to get through the door in one piece.

Professor Vivian was an extremely powerful woman. She was one of the heads of Ham Sapien's chemistry department and was brilliant at what she did. With her white hair (white because of her age, unlike Bijou who was born with the white hair) pulled back into a tight bun and her brimmed red glasses always framing her large, intense eyes, she could be a very intimidating woman.

Yet, by the way she wore a silly red and green hat atop her head and always laughed at some silly joke that no one else found funny along with the way she insisted that her students call her "Auntie Viv", she was indeed much more friendly than what one would have thought at first glance.

"I'm assuming," Professor Vivian, or Auntie Viv, started to say as she laid her briefcase on her desk, "that you two have a good reason for being absent during yesterday's midterm?"

She wanted a decent response, and Hamtaro and Bijou thought nervously. Would she find it amusing if she found out where they had been yesterday? Would she believe them?

"Oh, so you noticed?" Hamtaro asked nervously, trying to buy time as he tried, like Bijou, to think of a good excuse.

"Of course I did," Auntie Viv responded as her eyes glanced at them over her glasses. "You think I wouldn't notice that two of my best students were absent for this extremely important exam?"

Two of my best? Bijou couldn't help but think as her eyes shifted to Hamtaro. _Haruna? This kid had trouble getting a good conduct mark in kindergarten!_

"Is it possible to make up the exam?" Hamtaro asked. Bijou broke out of her reverie and nodded her head.

"Yes, Auntie Viv. We would really appreciate it," she supplied.

"Well of course you would, my dear, seeing as how this exam was crucial to your grade," Auntie Viv laughed furiously as Hamtaro and Bijou looked nervously at the woman. She gained her composure and adjusted her glasses on the bridge of her nose. "It all really depends on whether or not you had a good reason for being absent."

"A good reason?" Bijou asked slowly.

"Yes, of course! You see, every time I give a make up exam, I have to create a completely new test, and I don't want to waste my time if you two were simply playing hooky."

"Believe me, we were doing nothing of the sort," Hamtaro said quickly. This just caused Auntie Viv to raise a suspicious eyebrow at the two.

"Oh? So you two were together yesterday?" From the tone of her voice, it was obvious that Hamtaro and Bijou had brought doubt into her mind. "Do tell!"

Hamtaro cringed inwardly. Bijou would not resist an opportunity to bring him down if she had to go down herself. He just hoped that Auntie Viv would at least listen to his side of the story before refusing to let him take the test. He braced himself for the worst whenâ€¦

"It's my fault, Auntie Viv," Bijou admitted with an exasperated sigh. "You see, I had forgotten my chemistry notes at home and I really wanted to review before the midterm, and that's when I ran into Hamtaro. I didn't have my car and it was raining, so I would've had to walk home, and probably catch a cold by doing so, but Hamtaro very generously offered to take me to this underground clubhouse of his which was also a shortcut to my house. He didn't want to take me down there, for he told me it was too dangerous with the severe thunderstorm outside, but I was quite persistent."

Hamtaro was looking at Bijou with shock in his eyes but he let her continue anyway.

"Anyway, we ended up at the clubhouse, but lo and behold, just as Hamtaro suspected, there was this horrible cave-in. Two, actually, so we were blocked in from both sides. It wasn't until around midnight that our friends were able to get us out of the cave."

Auntie Viv looked at the two Ham-Humans. "And you expect me to believe that?"

Bijou looked up worriedly. Hamtaro noticed this and decided not to let her gesture go unnoticed.

"It's completely true. I have the dirt smudges on all my clothes to prove it," he explained. "And we probably never would have gotten out if Bijou didn't use her cell phone--which amazingly gets a great signal underground--to call her friends for help. She remained pretty calm while I let my emotions get the best of me."

Bijou looked at Hamtaro for a second with specks of gratitude in her eyes before she turned away.

Auntie Viv looked over at the two. "I seeâ€¦" Without another word, she turned around and walked over to her large closet. She opened it and disappeared inside.

Hamtaro immediately snapped his head at Bijou. "Why'd you do that?" His surprise made the words sound much more aggressive than he wanted.

"'Thank you' would be nice," Bijou whispered. "Besides, I knew that we would just get into an argument over what really happened and she would never believe us!"

"Although it really was all your fault," Hamtaro reminded.

"This is exactly what I meant," Bijou said. She quickly quieted herself down when they heard Auntie Viv leaving her closet. She came out with two half inch-thick booklets in her arms.

"These," Auntie Viv said as she gave Hamtaro and Bijou each one booklet. "Will be your review for the make-up midterm."

"Review?" the two asked in unison.

Auntie Viv nodded. "It's been over 25 years since someone missed one of my midterms."

Hamtaro and Bijou could feel themselves getting nervous. That couldn't be a good sign.

"And do you want to know why no one wants to miss one of my tests?" Auntie Viv asked. Although Hamtaro and Bijou did not respond, the looks on their faces as they scanned through their booklets said it all.

"Auntie Viv, there's stuff in here that I'm positive we've never learned," Bijou exclaimed.

"Half this booklet is stuff I've never seen!" Hamtaro looked up at his Professor.

"Well, that's the reason. My make-up midterms are more like a semester final. I'm giving you two a month. You'll need it."

"Auntie Viv," Bijou gasped, "all this for a midterm?"

"Think of how prepared you'll be for the rest of the semester," Auntie Viv reminded, not answering Bijou's question.

All of Hamtaro's happiness crumpled away and it took all of Bijou's strength to keep from thrashing the booklet in her hands into shreds.

"I suggest you two study the new material together," Auntie Viv finished with the smallest of smirks. "And of course, good luck."

* * *

><p>"This is horrible," Bijou cried as the two of them walked out of the building. "I don't have time to learn half of a semester's worth of chemistry by myself!"<p>

Hamtaro kicked a soda can that had been thrown on the lawn. "She's crazy. How are we ever going to pass this thing?"

"She said to work together," Bijou reminded as she pulled out her planner. "Study groups may be easy for you, but I don't have nearly as much free time, and like I would ever actually work with you," she

said as she started to pencil in times where she would have to study. She read her schedule aloud as if to remind herself what needed to be done. "Let's see, dinner with mother tomorrow. Tuesday's pretty goodâ€¦_Zut_ I have to attend a board meeting Wednesday! Oh, and Thursday I have an interviewâ€¦"

Hamtaro, who had stopped listening when she started to talk and had started to walk away, looked up wearily. "An interview? For what?"

Bijou looked up nervously and snapped her planner shut. "None of your business. I am a very busy woman and have many appointments, none of which concern you."

Hamtaro moved closer to the jewel heiress. "I know it can't possibly be an interview for a job since you'll take over Ribon Jewelers one day, right?" He had no idea why but suddenly, he started to feel insecure.

Crystal couldn't have told Bijou, could she?

It's not fair! He couldn't help but think. _She doesn't deserve it. She got everything she needsâ€¦she doesn't even need a job!_

Bijou didn't answer Hamtaro; instead, her planner held firmly in her hands, she started to walk away, but Hamtaro wasn't so quick to forget.

Hamtaro came in front of her and blocked her way. Bijou tried to move to the right, Hamtaro slid over to block her. Bijou moved to the left, Hamtaro slid to the left to block her. Bijou grunted.

"Move." Bijou was annoyed, that much was obvious. Hamtaro didn't budge, however, he did notice that her grip on her planner increased slightly.

"You wouldn't be lying to me, would you?" He asked slowly, leaning into her face.

"Get a life, Haruna, and stop worrying about mine." And with that said, Bijou swiftly stepped on Hamtaro's feet.

Hamtaro, although in pain, just as swiftly grabbed Bijou by her waist. The way, in the middle of the campus's walkway, his face was in Bijou's hair, some of the other students arriving for their morning classes, would have thought that they were a couple, greeting each other.

"Aww come on. We have no secrets, right? What's your interview for?" He asked with a smile as he whispered into her large, Ham-Human ears.

"You have ten seconds to let go or I'll scream," Bijou replied. Although she couldn't see his face since his arms were holding from around her back, she could still tell he was enjoying this because it tortured her. Nevertheless, Bijou maintained a fake smile so that the on-lookers wouldn't think too much of how physically close these two were.

"You want me to let go?"

"Yes," Bijou hissed, keeping that smile up. Surprisingly, Hamtaro actually released her, and Bijou quickly stepped away from him, relieved, untilâ€¦|

"Wow, you're right, Ribon. You are a pretty busy girl," Hamtaro said as he flipped through her journal. Indeed, many of the weeks were just filled with writing crammed everywhere. This girl needed to take a chill pill.

"I bet you think you're pretty sly," Bijou responded as she tried to reach for her journal, but unfortunately, Hamtaro used the length of his free arm to keep push her away, and since he was taller and significantly stronger than the girl, Bijou's efforts were basically useless.

"I was able to get the journal from you, wasn't I?" he answered in a somewhat interested voice. He had just flipped to the page that he was looking for. He started to take in what was written.

Dinner with mother at homeâ€¦|

Start writing the history paperâ€¦|

Shop for Maxwell's birthday giftâ€¦|

_Board meeting at 4:30... _

_Meet with mother for some "business talk" _(this had several sad faces doodled next to it)

And then, Hamtaro felt his eyes widen.

Interview at the Donaldson Gardensâ€¦|

"I knew it," Hamtaro snapped as he shoved the planner into Bijou's most-welcoming arms. "Crystal being your _bestie_ and all, I should have figured she would tell you."

"Because she's a decent person and she knows that I'd be a better botanist than you," Bijou explained as she checked her planner for any signs of damage. After finding none, she shoved the planner back into her bag.

"A: You would ****not**** make a better botanist than me. B: You don't even need a job! You're a flippin' heiress! You have all the money you could ever need already promised to you!" Hamtaro exclaimed, making some of the students passing the two of them turn their heads in curiosity.

"Who ever said that I couldn't do something else in the meantime? Something that I actually like?" Bijou responded with just as much fervor as Hamtaro. Hamtaro merely rolled his eyes.

"I'll get that job over you. There's no way a stuck-up, spoiled brat like you would get a job over me," Hamtaro cried as he came closer to her.

"There's no way anyone would give a job to an obnoxious creep like you, either!" Bijou exclaimed as she stepped up to him. "Don't get

too excited; I will get that job."

The way Hamtaro was exhaling made him seem like an enraged bull. "We'll see about that. Even if you did by some miracle get that job, all you'd ever be good for is a job as a lousy secretary, if you can even handle that much."

Hamtaro turned sharply and walked away, leaving Bijou in a fit of rage.

She might have been an heiress, but that sure as heck did not mean she could not take on a challenge, especially one brought up by a dimwit like Haruna.

"We'll see about that," she said before she turned in the exact opposite direction and stormed off.

* * *

><p>Ahhâ€|well that's all for chapter three folks!<p>

I hope you guys are enjoying this story so far, because I'm having a ball writing it!

(1) As for the reference to how, four years ago, the Hams found out about Bijou being an heiress, well, that's actually part of a story that I wrote like a billion years ago! Seriously, though, it was supposed to be a prequel to this story, but I decided not to post it. But that story does explain why you won't see Maxwell and Sparkle until after the "big twist" comes.

So do you guys want me to post the prequel? It's no big deal seeing as how it's already been written!

As for the individual reviews:

****AmyAddict1-****Thanks for reviewing! I'm glad you enjoyed the chapter!

****Cappyandpashy4ever-****I know, Hamtaro is purposefully meant to seem more mature. Unlike nearly all of my other stories, this fic actually revolves a little more around Hamtaro than it does Bijou. However, I'll explain more on how mature Hamtaro gets later on into the story. As for the reviews, I guess I'm just self-conscious and need reassurance that people don't think my writing is just garbage. But anyway, thanks for reviewing!

****Cherrie-Sakura-****You thought there was irony in the last two chapters? Wait til we get more into the story. Thanks for the review!

****Crystalgurl101-****I'm glad you thought Crystal was ok. I was so worried, and I fear I'm going to have that complex with every O.C. I have to put in here. As you can see, she was pretty important in this chapter. Thanks for reviewing!

****Lupyne-****Yes, there is a ton of foreshadowing. If you were to read the end of the story, you'd probably go "Cats! That was so totally hinted at in the first chapter!" So you're pretty smart for keeping your eyes out for that. Thanks for the review!

****LylHamGirl-***Cats, it's been a long time. Anyway, I'm so glad you like my writing skills. I love your reviews! They remind of old times! Thanks for reviewing!

****Writer-Gal77-***Yup, Hamtaro and Bijou are at each other's necks, as emphasized in this chapter. So yeah, this isn't like many other fics (or any other fic that I've seen, really). As for Crystal, she's Crystalgurl101's character, and she's pretty important in the story.

****HINT:**** The big plot twist that comes towards the end has a lot to do with who gets this job and what it leads them to do.

So thanks for reviewing!

****xxFadingAwayxx-***A little suspense is a good thing, right? Thanks for the review!

So tell me if you guys want to see the prequel to "Petals".

Til next time!

4. The Perks of Being a Girl

****CN****

****Petals****

****Chapter Four: **_The Perks of Being a Girl**
>

* * *

><p>That whole day during school, there was an even stronger-than-usual animosity amongst Hamtaro Haruna and Bijou Ribon. It was evident by the way they kept glaring at each other throughout their classes, trying to wear the other down, yet still wondering what would happen at that interview on Thursday.<p>

"Well I know that I'm not gonna have any problems getting that job," Hamtaro ranted at lunch as he stabbed his pasta vehemently. Deciding he wasn't in the mood for pasta, he dropped his fork and picked up a butter knife. He picked up a small piece of bread and a small prepackaged butter packet as well.

"I.mean.who.in.their.right.mind.would.give.that.stupid.dumb.annoying.little.miss.spoiled.a.job.over.me!" He cried as he vigorously rubbed butter all over the bread, all the while receiving strange looks from Stan, Boss and Oxnard.

"Dude, maybe you should take it easy," Stan said tentatively as he watched his orange and white-haired friend.

"I'm sure you'll get the jobâ€|No one would give a job to an heiress," Boss reminded as he took a large bite out of his apple. He chewed his apple for a while and added, "You're smarter than her I bet."

"I care to disagree. Pepper says that Bijou's one of the smartest girls she's ever met," Oxnard explained. To this, Hamtaro simply threw down his piece of bread and let out a gruff growl.

"Way to make him feel better, Oxy!" Stan exclaimed as he slapped the back of Oxnard's head.

"Professor Vivian said that Bijou and I were two of her best students," Hamtaro said quietly as he leaned his head against his fist.

"That still doesn't mean anything," Boss reminded. "I'm sure the people at the botanical gardens will agree that you've had a harder struggle in life and deserve this job more than she does."

"Yeah, come on," Stan said, "She may be a sweet girl," "to this, Hamtaro rolled his eyes "but she's still had it easier in life than you have, that much is obvious."

"I guess so," Hamtaro mumbled.

"Hey, guys! What's up?" an excited voice asked he sat down at the table.

"Hey, Panda," Stan greeted. As Stan looked up, he noticed Bijou, Pashmina and Sandy sitting at a table not too far from the one they were currently sitting at. "Oohh "forgive me, Haruna, but I'm gonna go fraternize with the enemy." With that said, he got up and went over to the girls' table.

"Try to convince her to skip that interview," Hamtaro added in a strange, somewhat upset-sounding and somewhat angered voice, just as Stan left the table.

"Why do you sound so down?" Panda asked as he poked the square end of his fork at Hamtaro.

"He's just upset because he's gotta beat out Bijou Ribon for a job," Boss explained. Panda made a strange face.

"Bijou Ribon, eh? Why does _she_ need a job "she owns a company, right?" Panda asked as he took a bite out of his lunch. He mulled over the thought for a while Hamtaro decided to keep igniting the flame.

"You're right, Panda! That girl was born with a stupid silver spoon in her mouth, all the money she'll ever need saved somewhere in a vault the size of my house, probably. And yet she's still going to try and steal a job from a hard-working Samaritan like me," he said angrily as his blue eyes sparkled. Boss, Oxnard and Panda tried to hide their laughter, but that wasn't an all-too-successful effort.

"What's so funny?" Hamtaro asked innocently as he watched his friends laugh at his words. "You think it's funny that Ribon is competing with me for a job she doesn't need?"

Panda held up his hand as he tried to chew his food without choking on it. As he finally swallowed down his food, he stared at

Hamtaro.

"A _Samaritan_? Sorry, Hamtaro, but your name isn't exactly synonymous with that term," he explained.

"Yeah, I agree. With all of the pranks you've pulled on Bijou over the pastâ€|how many years?" Oxnard asked before Hamtaro really had a chance to answer.

"Seventeen," Boss supplied. "We've known her since pre-school, remember Oxy?"

"Right, seventeen yearsâ€|Well, in that time you've played a whole lotta tricks on her, and wouldn't it be funny if her ultimate revenge was stealing this job right out from under your nose? _That_ would be amusing," Oxnard said simply as he took a sip of water from his bottle.

"Cats, Oxy, whose side are you on?" Hamtaro asked indignantly. To this, Oxnard shrugged and Hamtaro turned around and stared at Stan, who was still sitting at Bijou's table (along with Pashmina and Sandy). Ribon was laughing animatedly with Stan and looked quite happy. Pashmina and Sandy were also leaning across the table and telling something to Stan, which he must've enjoyed listening to for he couldn't help smiling. Then, out of nowhere, Stan leaned back and Hamtaro watched as he placed his head in Bijou's lap.

Bijou, instead of rejecting Stan, simply laughed some more and offered him some of the grapes she was nibbling on. Hamtaro watched this scene unfold with narrowed eyes.

"Relax, you probably will get that job," Boss reminded. Then a thought hit him. "Hey, Haruna?"

Hamtaro's eyes were still locked on that table and he was not really listening to anything else that was going on.

"Hamtaro?" Boss asked again. Still no answer.

"Hey buddy," Oxnard called with no success.

"Hamtarooooo!!" Panda cried as he waved his hands in front of Hamtaro's face. Hamtaro suddenly broke out of his reverie and shook his head.

"Sorry. Was someone talking to me?" he asked as he turned around.

"Yeah, stupid, I was just about to ask you something before you spaced out," Boss said in an annoyed tone.

Hamtaro tore off a small bit of a noodle from his pasta and flicked it at Boss. "What?"

"Well," Boss said as he flicked the piece back at Hamtaro, "I was just wondering if you knew if your interviewer would be a boy or a girl?"

"Not sure," Hamtaro admitted as he thought about it. "Why?" he finally asked as he flicked the piece of pasta away. Panda and Oxnard

suddenly made a strange face, as if they had just realized something...something bad.

"That could be a problem," Boss said as he put his hand to his mouth, "if the interviewer is a boy, that is," he added quickly.

Hamtaro, not quite understanding, stared at the group of boys with a confused expression.

"The perks of being a girl," Panda said under his breath just loud enough for everyone at the table to hear.

"You meanâ€|she might flirt her way into a job?" Hamtaro asked, eyebrows arched.

"You sound surprisedâ€|why?" Boss asked.

"You have to be somewhat good looking for that to work, am I right?" Hamtaro reminded more than asked. The boys at the table nodded in agreement. "Well thenâ€|there's the problem!"

"Kid," Boss started to say as he finished clearing his throat, once again using that voice he used to prove that he knew more about Hamtaro in the category of girls, "you can criticize Ribon all you want about being spoiledâ€|I'm sure she was, she probably still is. _But_ don't say that that girl is _not_ good-looking," Boss said as he shifted his head in the direction of Ribon.

Hamtaro's eyes widened and his mouth hung ajar. "Ribon? Pale-skinned, white-haired Ribon?"

"You gotta look beyond that," Boss explained.

"I don't get what you see," Hamtaro admitted. "She'll always be that annoying French brat to me."

"Well, you'd be in quite the minority," Panda added as a small blush crept onto his cheeks. "I mean, Stan certainly seems to think so."

* * *

><p>"Stan, I'm sure you've had more than enough of your daily dose of grapes," Bijou said as she tried to get the boy's head out of her lap.<p>

"Bijou, my sweet, sweet lady friend, I told you: I have to have exactly one full branch thingy of grapes fed to me by a gorgeous babe everyday. Don't worry, Pashmina: Your turn's tomorrow."

"Geeâ€|I feel like the luckiest girl in the world," Pashmina added.

"Wellâ€|when's Crystal's turn? You do know that she's back in town for a couple of days, right?" Bijou asked, knowing Stan's weakness. Stan's eyes widened and he immediately sat up.

"Really?" he asked, slightly unbelieving of what Bijou said. As he saw the smirks he was receiving from Bijou, Sandy and Pashmina, he started to stutter, "I-I meanâ€|she'll get her t-t-turn the day after tom-tom-tomorrow!" he finally spat out.

"Saving the best for last, Stanny?" Sandy asked, her smirk unwavering. Stan merely scowled in response and then turned to Bijou.

"I need to ask you something," he said as he took her hands into his own, a flirting technique he always used on Bijou.

"And that would be?" the French girl asked as she started to swing their linked hands a few inches to each side.

"Why do you need a job?" he asked quickly. "Just curious as to why you're going to that interview on Thursday, that's all."

"I hope that wasn't supposed to be a subtle attempt by Haruna to get me to not come," Bijou said as she let go of Stan's hands.

"No, of course not! Just asking a little question to one of my bestest friends ever," Stan explained as he blinked his eyes several times, an attempt of making fun of how girls flirted.

"Well, if you really want to knowâ€"and I suggest increasing the volume on your microphone incase Haruna's got you wiredâ€"I just wanted to do something that Iâ€|well, you know, liked," she said, without even looking at Stan, as she pulled off a grape and put it into her mouth. The fact was she wasn't really looking at anyone at this particular moment. This was a touchy topic for her.

"What you like?" Stan asked, confused.

"Didn't I explain this to you when I first went into this school under a science major?" Bijou sighed. "In short, I like science better than businessâ€|but, it was my daddy's wish that I be the first girl born a Ribon to take over the company, and I want to respect his wish, so eventually I will be CEO of that company."

"But until that day comes, you want a science-related job," Stan said to himself. "Makes sense."

Bijou's face turned into a small smile. "Explain that to your jerk of a friend," she said as she turned to Stan with a bunch of grapes in her cupped hand. "Open up."

Stan more than enjoyed all this attention he was receiving, and this was more than dually noted by the group of boys sitting at a table not too far away.

* * *

><p>A little blue car drove through the highways that afternoon. The thunderstorm from last night left many of the roads flooded, so there was a lot more traffic than usual. But the three girls within the car didn't mindâ€|they were unwinding from a long hard day of school.<p>

â€|well, sort ofâ€|

"â€|and so I completely blanked out and couldn't even remember the sine of 90, or the sine of half pi," Pashmina explained with her head in her hands. She brought her head back up and stared out the

passenger side window of Bijou's car.

"Aren't the sine of 90 and the sine of half pi the same thing?" Sandy asked from the backseat.

"I'm pretty sure they are," Bijou said, concentrating more on the road than the conversation, as she turned a corner. She glanced quickly at her friend. "I'm sure you did fine."

"Yeah, like since when do you not do well on a math test?" Sandy reminded. "You're like Bij always stressing out with all this unnecessary worrying." This last part made Bijou glare at Sandy through her rearview mirror; Sandy simply waved (in what she thought was a very cute manner) back to Bijou.

"Guys, really, you have no ideaâ€¦I totally forgot everything." Pashmina leaned against her seat. "At least October break's in a couple of weeksâ€¦I'll get some much needed time off."

"Definitely," Sandy agreed as she stared out the window.

"Not me," Bijou sighed. "Crys said that if I got the job, I'd have to start ASAP, meaning my first few days of work will probably be during October break."

"Soâ€¦then wouldn't it kinda be a good thing if Hamtaro got the job over you?" Pashmina asked. Bijou bit her lip as she thought.

"I guess if I really felt like I needed some time offâ€¦but the truth it, I don't. I'm not totally overloaded these days," Bijou replied.

"What about that chemistry makeup test?" Sandy reminded. Bijou winced for a second, but then she smiled.

"I'll just have to study a little harder than usualâ€¦"

"And does your mother still expect you to come in every Wednesday afternoon to intern at the company?" Pashmina asked.

"Well yeahâ€¦"

"That on top of all your other schoolwork," Pashmina added.

"It's nothing I can't handle, really-"

"And if you got that jobâ€¦like when would you ever have free time?" Sandy asked.

Bijou tapped her fingers on the steering wheel as the car continued driving down the road. "Are you two trying to make a point?"

"We're just saying it wouldn't be the end of the world if you didn't get the job," Pashmina explained.

"You have a little too much on your plate as it is without the added worries of that job," Sandy supplied.

"I do not," Bijou cried. After seeing the looks she got from Pashmina and Sandy, she decided to change her opinion a little. "And even if I

do, it's only going to help me in the long run. How am I supposed to be successful if I don't work hard?"

"Bijou, you're going to be the head of some gazillion dollar company in a few years, what's not successful about that?" Sandy exclaimed.

"Yeah but that's gonna be handed to me. I'm not gonna earn it. That's why I have to prove Haruna wrong that I am not just a spoiled brat and can actually do something on my own." Bijou stared out at the road with a fiery passion in her eyes, which just amused Sandy.

"If you say so."

Pashmina looked at Bijou for a moment, wondering if she should ask something. "Would you admit he's cute?" Sandy leaned forward as she examined Bijou's face. The white-haired girl sighed.

"I guess he is," she said at length.

"Oh, so you'll admit that but not swallow your pride and say that you're too busy?" Sandy asked.

"I'm not in middle school, guys. If I think some guy's cute I'll admit that much," Bijou explained. Suddenly, the sound of thunder shook throughout the sky and the three girls stared out the windows. There were gray, ominous clouds looming, dangerously close to releasing a downpour over the city. Sandy and Pashmina looked over at Bijou and saw her frightened face.

"Don't worry, I'm sure we'll beat the rain," Pashmina assured Bijou as the French girl's face paled considerably.

* * *

><p>"So that's all she said? Because she wants to do something that she likes?" Hamtaro cried as he fell back onto his couch.<p>

"Yeah, it's understandable," Stan added as he sat down beside Hamtaro with a large bowl full of popcorn.

"It's corny."

"Well how would you feel if you had a predetermined job that you really didn't like? Wouldn't you at least want to have a job that interested you for a little while?" Oxnard asked as he sat down on the other side of Stan and took a large handful of popcorn.

"Seriously, Oxy, try to remember that you're my best friend!" Hamtaro cried as he ran a hand through his hair.

"What's with you?" Boss asked from the kitchen of their apartment. "You're usually not this upset over anything."

Hamtaro groaned. "I've been seeing more of that girl than I want to over the past few days."

"Don't see what the problem is," Boss said with a wry little smile on his face.

"Yeah, I like seriously fail to see what's wrong," Stan added.

Hamtaro tapped his fingers against the armrest of the couch. "Are you trying to make a point?"

"Yeah, relax," Stan said. "There will be other jobs."

"But not as great as this one," Hamtaro reminded. "And the thing is, I'm actually really interested in botany, and she'll probably end up leaving soon so that she can head her company, so what's the point of her having this job in the long run?"

"I'm sure they'll consider all those things at the interview," Oxnard reassured.

"I guess so," Hamtaro said under his breath. As he continued drumming his fingers along the side of the couch, a thought hit him. "Maybe if I talk to her--"

"Woahâ€|kid, I think that's the last thing that will make her change her mind," Boss said as he sat down on the couch.

"Yeah, just let fate unwind as it may," Stan said in that smooth voice which didn't sound nearly as nice with a mouthful of popcorn, unbeknownst to him.

* * *

><p>The next morning, Bijou's mother was talking up a storm on the telephone, and this was especially inconvenient for the girl since she was desperately trying to get ready.<p>

"_Oui, oui, je sais!" _ (Yes, yes, I know!) Bijou cried as she pulled a navy blue sweater over her head. "I have to take over the company eventuallyâ€|muzzer, we've been over this so many times!" she cried to the speakerphone as she went over to her vanity.

"Bijou, zarling," her mother still had a very strong French accent, "last night, I waz zalking to zee lawyers at zee company."

"_Oui, qu'est-ce que ils ont dit?"_ (Yes, what did they say?) Bijou asked as she quickly worked her blue ribbon into her hair.

"You will never believe it!" her moth cried. For some reason, this made Bijou more nervous than excited.

* * *

><p>As the white-haired girl stepped out of her small house which she shared with her two best friends, she was immediately greeted by a bouquet of very pretty flowers. She looked up to see who was holding the flowers, and as soon as she saw, she continued walking away.<p>

"You?" Bijou asked as she quickly stepped down the stairs of her porch and walked down the front path. She desperately wished Sandy and Pashmina would get ready sooner so that she didn't have to deal with this nuisance alone.

"You know, when a guy gives a girl flowers, he expects something in returnâ€|a hug, a squeal of gratitude, a kiss at least," Hamtaro teased as he followed her.

"Please, go, I'm not in the mood this morning," Bijou said, keeping her head low as she unlocked her car's door. Hamtaro noted that her usual anger was not that strong.

"I can see that," he replied as he watched her. "Anyway, these flowers are for you." He held the bouquet to her once again, but Bijou turned didn't accept them.

Bijou stared at the flowers. "If I put my nose too close to them, will water come spraying out at me?" she asked dully.

"Not exactly," Hamtaro said. "I just wanted to talk. Can we take my car to school today? It was just fixed."

Bijou sighed heavily and looked at the boy. She leaned into the slightly opened door of her car.

"If it's about the job, then just know, you can have it."

* * *

><p>Well, I don't really like this chapter, but not every chapter can have a ton of action I suppose. Don't worry, there'll be plenty of surprises coming up soon.<p>

I'm just really excitedâ€|the 'big twist' that I've been hinting at is soon, but not just yet, so hold on!

****AmyAddict1-****You asked if I liked writing plot twisters and if there would be any big twists coming upâ€|clears throatâ€|yes, I ADORE twists in stories. And there will be one major twist to come in this story (the big one) that will shock all the parties involved, and then some. This twist will introduce the characters that haven't yet been mentioned and force a lot of new changes, not necessarily good ones at all. So there's your answer.

****Cappyandpashy4ever-****Yeah, who gets the job is actually pretty critical to the rest of the story. Let's hope you enjoy reading it. I can't wait to write it! Thanks for the review!

>
Crystalgurl101-****I'm really glad you think Crystal's in character so far. Sorry, I had to cut her out of this chapter (there was a scene with her and Hamtaro), but in order to keep this story from running away with OCs, I decided to keep this chapter pretty much canon. And, if you think the rivalry's getting good _now_, just wait untilâ€|you'll see!**

****Kaitlyn Takaishi-****What you said in your last reviewâ€|mhmmmâ€|I..ummâ€|thanks for your review! â€|sheepishâ€|No â€|comment?!

****LylHamGirl-****You're so sweet! And don't' say that at all! You're a wonderful writer, didn't Celestial Night say so herself? lol I know the feelingâ€|when an author I like updates their story, I'll put a

halt to everything to read that chapter!

****Wishbone the Lover of Books-***I'm really glad you changed your mind about this story! Trust me, it does get much better. And longer, actuallyâ€|I have it all perfectly planned, if I do say so myself.

Well, the prequel to this story is up, and it's been written and finished for a while. But I have a pattern of updating. Petals, Chuujitsu, then Unfurling.

Please review? I know this chapter wasn't anything special, but please??

-CN

5. Letâ€™s Make a Bet

****CN**

>Petals
Chapter Five: ****_Let's Make a Bet**
>

* * *

><p>Hamtaro cocked an eyebrow, wondering exactly what Bijou's angle was.<p>

"What do you mean, 'you can have it'?" He asked as he came closer to the girl, virtually eliminating the distance between the two.

"Cats, you're more of an idiot than I thought," Bijou said as she started getting into her car. "I meant precisely what I said. You can have the job, Haruna." She slammed her car's door in his face. She then honked the horn, anxiously awaiting the arrival of Pashmina and Sandy.

Hamtaro shook his head and leaned into the driver's side window. "Come on, I even brought you flowersâ€|can't we just talk?" he asked, trying his best to put on a pout.

"Oh you have got to be kidding me," Bijou said under her breath. "Pouting doesn't work for you, Haruna, it just makes you look more pathetic than usual."

Hamtaro's face suddenly donned a scowl. "What's your problem? I just want to talk."

Bijou snapped her head and looked at him, emerald eyes aflame. "And what's your problem? I just said you can have the job, so what else do you want?"

"It's not like you to give up that easilyâ€|I know you well enough to know that," Hamtaro spat back.

Appearing not a moment too soon, the front door to the small house swung open to reveal Pashmina and Sandy running down the stoop. Right as they reached Bijou's car, they realized there was an extra person

in the driveway.

"Hamtaro, why are you here?" Pashmina asked. The boy stepped away from the car and grunted.

"Well, I offered Ms. Ribon here a ride-"

"Why? She has a car," Sandy cut in.

"I know, it's just that I wanted to talk to her," Hamtaro explained. The way Pashmina and Sandy looked at him made him supply, "About the job interview." He waved the flowers he had brought in the air to show that he was trying to put up a friendly façade.

"And I told him that he could have the job," Bijou explained. Pashmina and Sandy immediately turned their heads and stared at the girl, their eyes as wide as plates.

"Well why did you go and do something like that?" Pashmina exclaimed.

"You can't just give up!" Sandy cried.

"This is exactly why I think something's up," Hamtaro explained. "Something smells fishy."

"It's probably you," Bijou rebutted.

Hamtaro crushed the stem of the bouquet in his hands. "Oh yeah? Your _mom_-"

"Hamtaro," Sandy chimed in before anything else could be said, "Move your car. It's in our way." Her eyes looked over to the silver sedan parked directly behind Bijou's car.

Hamtaro bit his lip and stepped forward to Bijou's window.

"If you don't move your car, I'll just backup right into it," the girl threatened in a low voice. Hamtaro laughed.

"Yeah, your little blue car is gonna be able to do any damage to mine? I'd like to see that," he teased, but seeing Bijou's glare become stronger, he cleared his throat. "You're in a worse mood than normal today-"

"And you suddenly seem to care?" Bijou asked skeptically.

"Don't flatter yourself. I just want to know why you're pretending like you don't want the job."

"I'm not pretending. I've decided that I don't want it."

"You don't honestly expect me to buy that, do you?" his voice was low, too. The two of them could see through the side view mirror that Pashmina and Sandy were listening intently, although they were feigning another conversation. Normally, Hamtaro didn't really care if they heard, but since Bijou was making it a point to talk very quietlyâ€|

"We can talk in my carâ€|it's more private," he explained. "And you

don't look like you're in the best mood to be driving today."

"Why do we need to talk? I just gave you what you wanted," the French girl reminded.

"Or so you want me to think." Bijou rolled her eyes.

"Don't make more of this than there is," she snapped. "You really can't leave me alone, can you?"

"I won't move my car until you agree to talk with me," Hamtaro explained as he tapped his fingers whimsically against her car door.

And simply because she knew that both Pashmina and Sandy wouldn't stop asking her questions on the drive to school, and that she was in no mood to drive, anyway, she released her seat belt and swung open her door.

Pashmina and Sandy watched with shocked eyes as she handed Pashmina the keys, and with a defeated sort of tired sigh, followed Hamtaro into his car.

* * *

><p>Bijou pressed the bouquet of flowers to her nose as she watched the roads pass by. How could Haruna drive in a car that smelled like so much â€|boy?<p>

She glanced over at Hamtaro (she had noticed him looking over at her once or twice in the span of five minutes that they had been driving), wondering why he was all of a sudden so quiet when he was the one so adamant on getting answers.

Not that she wanted him to start talking, of course. She just wanted a bit of quiet after the morning that she had.

"So, are you going to tell what what's wrong?" he probed, returning her glance for a second as he shifted his head back to the road.

"You're not my therapist."

"Oh believe me, I pity the poor fool that is, but something is obviously getting you pissed and I want to know if it affects my chances of getting the job."

Bijou decided to take in the soft humming of the car against the roads for a second before answering, thinking about what to say.

"It does affect you chances; I just said you can have the job, so there," Bijou reminded as she leaned against the seat of the car. "I still don't understand why you can't just be happy with that."

"That's so not the attitude you had yesterday."

"People change and grow as they mature, Haruna, but that's something you probably know nothing about."

Ignoring that comment, Hamtaro continued driving. "What I originally came to talk to you about was getting that jobâ€¦I wanted to try and talk you out of it."

"Well I saved you that trouble, didn't I?" Bijou replied.

"Something's really bothering you today, isn't it?" When he received no answer, he continued, "See, I thought that you already have a lot of money and you don't need a job, and I really didn't wanna hear about how you just wanted to do something in science, something that interests you more than business. Frankly, it would be a perfect world if everyone became whatever they wanted to be."

"Are you going somewhere with this?" her voice was not full of sarcasm or criticism, which actually caused Hamtaro to give her more than just a quick glance. Rather, it was quite subdued and meek.

"It just feels weird to be handed something like this job without properly earning it," he explained. "I mean, when you said that you didn't want itâ€¦I meanâ€¦all of a suddenâ€¦I don't trust you," he finally exclaimed. "You have to be up to something. You're probably messing with my psyche or whatever."

"Well you don't have to trust me; you just have to know that I have no intentions of going to that interview on Thursday and that's that." The car pulled up to a stoplight, and Hamtaro took this moment to get a good look at her face. Maybe she would crack under his stare and tell him what she was up to.

But her eyes were distraught, not scheming. Hamtaro actually felt for herâ€¦just for a second, though.

"Come on, Ribon-"

"You said so yourself: It'd be a perfect world if everyone became whatever they wanted to beâ€¦"

"What's this aboutâ€¦?"

Bijou looked to the side and twiddled one of the flower's petals between her fingers.

He continued staring at her for a moment, analyzing what was going on within that all-too-complex mind of hers. He had to shift his attention, though, when the light turned green and the car continued moving down the lanes.

"â€¦and this world is far from perfect."

* * *

><p>"Let's make a bet," Stan cried as he approached his sister. Sandy looked up at him for a second and then returned to the book she was studying from.<p>

"Go away, Stan, we're studying," Sandy explained as she went back to her book. Pashmina gave a small smile to Stan before she returned to her notes.

"Come on, it'll be fun," Stan urged as he sat down beside his sister on the outdoor table.

"First of all, I don't even know what I'm betting on, so no. Second of all, you lose all your bets anyway, so there's no point for you, really, and I just wanna save you the humiliation," Sandy said quickly as she went back to her book. Stan looked crestfallen for a second then immediately changed his expression to one of an ambitious child.

"But _Sands_- " An ambitious, whiny child.

"Consider it my good deed of the day, Stan, now-"

"Ok, fine. At least tell me this: who do you think will get the job?" He said as he looked at her expectantly.

Sandy bit her lip and thought. "You mean out of Hamtaro and Bijou?" Her voice suddenly sounded as though she were actually interested.

"No, _really_â€|"

"The answer to that is easy, Stan," Pashmina started to say, "just this morning Bijou said-"

"She said that she's gonna own Hamtaro at the interview and get that job!" Sandy quickly finished as she kicked Pashmina's foot under the table. Pashmina gave Sandy a confusedâ€"and painedâ€"look but Sandy chose to ignore it.

"I think Hamtaro's gonna get it," Stan explained, "there's no doubt about it."

"And this is what you want to bet on? Who gets the job?" Sandy asked as she slowly closed her book, considering this bet.

"Ummmâ€|yeah, isn't it kind of obvious?"

"Just making sure," Sandy replied. She put her finger to her lips and continued to think. "It's definitely Bijou, I'll bet anything on that." Pashmina gave Sandy another look.

"Anything?" Stan asked as he flashed her his brilliant smile.

"Anything," Sandy replied, giving the identical smile in return. Pashmina put a hand to her forehead. _This is _not_ goodâ€|_

Stan leaned into his sister. "Including a hundred and fifty bucks?"

"That's a lot of money, Sandy," Pashmina warned cautiously before the other girl could answer.

"Come on, Pashy, we have purses worth more than that," Sandy reminded. "And it's weird, Stan, because isn't 150 dollars what you owe dad for getting that huge scratch on the car?"

"That's not relevant," Stan quickly replied as his cheeks turned a

little pink.

"Oooohhh, I bet Crystal would love to see that scratch. I mean how many years has it been since you've gotten a license and you _still_ can't drive away from the mailbox?" Sandy teased.

"A mailbox?" Pashmina asked incredulously.

"It was dark," Stan reminded. "I couldn't see."

"Which is why you turn on the headlights, oh, wait, you forgot to do that," Sandy sighed. "I really cannot believe we are related."

"It's not as bad as forgetting that a little piggy goes oink instead of quack!" Stan exclaimed.

"Is he talking about the play in third grade where you were a little piglet?" Pashmina asked.

"It was first grade," Sandy pouted, her cheeks turning pink, "and in my defense I was having a really bad week!"

"Yeah, but you only had one line, Sands, and that was 'I'm Piggina the Piggy and I go oink oink!'"

"Oh I remember! And you saidâ€|oh cats, what did you sayâ€|'Ummmâ€|I think piggies go quack'?" Pashmina laughed. "Oooohhh!! You were the cutest little pig-duck that I ever did see!" she said as she reached across the table and pinched Sandy's cheek. Sandy frowned.

"You know they _still_ talk about that little girl who didn't know her farm animals at all the school bake sales," Stan explained. "You're a living legend."

"If I win the bet you're never to bring that incident up again, Stanley," Sandy said, "and I also win the 150 bucks."

"And you be sure to remember that when _I_ win, I wantâ€|hmmmâ€|I'll have to think of something, but I'll get back to you. Oh, and the money, of course."

Sandy gave Stan a sarcastic smile. Stan stood up, ruffled Sandy's hair, and started to walk across the campus.

"Bijou's gonna get the job!" Sandy cried as he walked away. "I'll be waiting for the money!" Sandy smiled determinedly to herself, but as soon as she noticed the strange glare she was receiving from Pashmina, her smile faded.

"Sandy, let's get serious here: Bij said she didn't want the job."

"So?"

"So do you want to pay your brother 150 bucks?"

Sandy laughed but then her laughter suddenly became a serious expression. "Bij is getting that job and I'm gonna make sure of it. She's going to that interview. This is personal."

"The pig-duck thing wasn't even that bad-"

"No, Pashy, this is deeper than that. This all goes back to Hamtaro and Bijou's rivalry," Sandy explained.

"Heke?" Pashmina asked as she tilted her head. "Now you've lost me."

"Ever since we were little, I've been best friends with Bij and he's been best friends with Hamtaro. And those two are always competing with each other, so we've always felt that whoever came out on top would be the better friend. Can you see how this leads to a twin rivalry? We're on a constant mission to prove that our best friend is better than the other one's best friend, and this is a battle I refuse to lose. This job seems to be the culmination of Hamtaro and Bijou's years of fighting; they've never wanted something before like this. So whoever wins this battle of getting the job is going to prove once and for all who is the better of the best friends! And I'll be damned if Bijou loses. No! I won't lose! I can't! Not to Stan!" As Sandy said all of this, a fire ignited in her eyes and she crushed the pencil she was holding with her hands.

A sweatdrop appeared on the back Pashmina's head as she watched Sandy go crazy with her ambition. "You can't be serious!"

* * *

><p>"But we wanna know!" Pashmina whined, not letting Bijou eat her dinner in peace. "How can you just suddenly change your mind about something as good as this?"<p>

"It's not important. I just don't want the job anymore," Bijou explained yet again as she took a bite of her food and flipped another page of her chemistry book simultaneously.

"But can't you at least go to the interview to see if you would've gotten the job?" Sandy asked expectantly.

Bijou continued reading her textbook, obviously wanting to close this topic once and for all. But Sandy and Pashminaâ€"but still Mostly Sandyâ€"were not going to let that happen.

"You were offered a great opportunity, and you're actually pretty good at all this science stuff! why in your right mind would you turn this down?" Sandy asked from across the table as she struck it with her fists. "You'll never get anywhere if you don't try!"

Pashmina took a large sip of her water. "Yeah!" she added, trying to support Sandy.

Bijou glanced up for a minute. "Why are you getting so passionate about this, Sandy?"

"Believe me, she has about 150 reasons to be so passionate," Pashmina chimed, but seeing the angry glare she got from Sandy, she went back to sipping her water.

"I just want you to succeed," Sandy said honestly as her eyes all-too-immediately filled with emotion. "And the only reason I have

for that is because you're one of my best friends."

"And which greeting card did you steal that line from?" Pashmina asked as she laughed. Sandy's eyes lost the emotion and sent another vicious glare to Pashmina.

Bijou smiled at the two girls as she closed her book and stood up. She took her dinner plate to the sink where she picked up a sponge and started to scrub absentmindedly.

"That's sweet, Sandy, but I am going to succeed. I'm going to head one of the largest jewel companies in the world," the French girl said softly as she turned on the water and got lost in a thought.

"But that's later, right? You said you wanted to do something science-related before then," Pashmina reminded as she watched the girl from behind.

"No—it's not later," Bijou said even more softly than before. Her friends didn't even hear her say those words. She then realized that the water she turned on had become extremely hot; she had been too numb to realize that her hand was being burned by the water. She cried as she brought her hand away from the faucet. In the process, though, she broke the plate she had been washing.

"Nice, Bij," Sandy teased as Bijou crouched down and started gathering the plate's shards in her hands. "You should really get a dustpan for that, though." But Bijou either didn't hear or she didn't feel the need for a dustpan.

"Oohhh—what happened?" a bathrobe-clad Crystal asked as she appeared in the doorway of the dining area. Bijou threw away the shards of the plate and turned to Crystal excitedly, finding a new topic to focus on.

"Crystal, how long are you staying with us?" Bijou asked as she approached the girl. "Don't you have to return to Kyoto soon?"

Crystal blinked as she stared at Bijou's extremely eager face. "Umm—well, October break already started for me, so a couple of weeks, I guess?"

"Great! That'll give us plenty of time to bond," Bijou said excitedly. "We haven't seen each other in so long!"

"Yeah since Bijou isn't getting that job you offered her," Pashmina said.

"Well, we don't know that yet," Crystal reminded. "The interview isn't til Thursday."

"Oh but Bij isn't going," Sandy explained. "Oh, _darn_, she hadn't told you yet, Crys? But I'm right, aren't I, Bij?"

Crystal glared at Bijou, her eyes locked on the white-haired heiress.

Bijou shrank away from Crystal. "Hehe—" she started to say

sheepishly. "I decided I didn't want the job?" she offered meekly.

"But Bijou, you seemed pretty into it when I first offered you the interview," Crystal said a little indignantly. "Why don't you want to work there?"

"You don't know why I changed my mind," the European girl reminded.

"But I'd like to," Crystal countered.

Crystal's eyes were filled with real emotion—confusion, and to be perfectly honest, just a bit of pain as well. Bijou didn't know how to respond. She didn't want to insult Crystal and say that she didn't want to work at the botanical gardens, because that was a lie.

But in reality, she hadn't accepted the truth yet.

As the girl looked around the small room from Sandy to Pashmina to Crystal, she sighed. The truth was going to have to come out sooner or later. She had experience with keeping things from her friends, and it always ended by blowing up in her face. Senior year of high school stuck out in particular—

"Something's wrong, isn't it, Bij? Even Hamtaro picked up on that," Pashmina said. She pulled out the chair next to her and patted it.

Bijou, as if she were obeying a parent, sat down in the chair. She averted her eyes to the floor and came into herself, as if being punished. Crystal followed suit and sat down at the table.

"So—my mom called today," Bijou started to explain. The three other girls in the room glanced nervously at each other. Mrs. Ribon called? That was hardly ever good news for her daughter.

"Ok, well, she said she had good news," the girl continued as she started to twist her hands. She then started to run a nervous hand through her white locks.

"And it probably wasn't anything good, was it?" Pashmina asked as she pushed a stray white strand away from Bijou's face.

Bijou's hands settled down and she sighed. "She's retiring—"

Crystal gasped and Sandy's eyes lowered. Pashmina gave her friend a sympathetic look as she realized what this meant for the girl.

"From like being the CEO?" the strawberry blonde asked.

"Exactly," Bijou said. "When I graduate in fact, and according to her, that's when I'm to take over."

"But graduation's in like seven and a half months," Pashmina said as she thought. "You'll be so young."

Bijou feigned a smile and nodded. "The youngest CEO ever, plus the only girl ever born a Ribon to take over the company. That was my

father's dream."

"But I don't get why you don't have to take the job at the botanical gardens," Crystal explained.

"But my mom's insisting that I take over the company when she retiresâ€|"

"Yeah, but that's in seven and a half months!" Crystal exclaimed. "You'll can still take the job in the meantime, or at least go to the interview."

Bijou shook her head. "This is just my mom's way of reminding me that some things are unavoidable."

"I think Crystal's right, Bij," Sandy said as she reached across the table and patted Bijou's hand. "The fact that you're gonna take over anyway means that you should enjoy something you like in the time you have left."

"'The time you have left'? She's not dying, Sandy," Pashmina said.

"You know what I mean," Sandy said. "You can't let this bring you down. I think getting the garden job may be the best thing for you."

"Plus," Crystal started to say, "you have got to see the guy who'll end up being your bossâ€|he's just soooooâ€|Well, you just have to _look_ at himâ€|"

Bijou put on a small smile. "Do you guys really think that?"

"That the guy's dreamy? Yeah!!" Crystal exclaimed.

"No, Crys, not that. Do you guys think I should try for this job, even though I'll just end up leaving after a few months?"

"Why not?" the three other girls asked in unison.

Bijou smiled again and looked up as she mumbled, "I guess you have a point."

"This is greatâ€|just show them you're A game, Bij, and you'll get that job. I know you will. Then it will all work out perfectly and I'll show Stan just how great you actually areâ€|Oh I can see his face right now when I tell him that you got the job! Take that you loser! Mock me, will you? I am the greatest pig-duck in all the world and I'll show you how amazing I am. Just get that job, Bij, yes, just winâ€|" The world became a black background for Sandy as the fire reignited in her eyes and she held up her dinner fork like a battle sword. Thunder cackled in the dark background for an added affect of power.

At Sandy's slightly maniacal sounding laughter, Bijou and Crystal turned to look at her.

"What's-" Crystal started to ask suspiciously.

"Don't ask," Pashmina said as she rolled her eyes.

* * *

><p>"So waitâ€|Bijou said that she didn't want the job?" Stan asked yet again as he barged into Hamtaro's room.

Hamtaro sighed. "For the seventh time, Stan, yes. She told me several times that she didn't want the job and that she wasn't going to the interview. Now leave; I gotta study for chem."

"So that means you have the job, right?"

"Pretty much."

"And that there's no way she can get the job?"

"I supposeâ€|"

"Just making sure: the job is definitely, positively absolutely yours, right?"

"Apparently, Stan. Listen I really have to-"

"Are you certain that there's no doubt?"

"Yes!"

"Are you really sure?"

Instead of getting a verbal answer, a large piece of crumpled paper was thrown in Stan's face.

"Get out of my room, Torahamu!"

"Wait, wait, did she at least like the flowers?"

"I don't know," Hamtaro said as he returned to his book.

"Aww, she didn't. Is that why you're so grumpy?"

"GET OUT!"

* * *

><p>Saturday morning came, and then Sunday morning, and then of course, the dreaded Monday. But as each day flew by, Hamtaro knew that he was just inches closer to the start of a very successful future. His first real jobâ€"and at one of the leading botanical gardens in the area!<p>

He hadn't always been someone who looked forward to jobs at opportunities. Like every normal kid, which then automatically excluded Ribon, he dreamed of becoming as astronaut or a cowboy or something extravagant. He never considered a real career until high school.

He was good at science, but then again, he was good at soccer, too, but he had to be honest: he was just way too good-looking to risk his looks by playing such a violent sport. (That, and the fact that he would probably never be drafted for a professional soccer team made

him consider a career in science.)

Actually, it was Boss who was always his partner in high school physics and chemistry and biology. He would explain concepts that Hamtaro couldn't get, so once Hamtaro decided to open his bio textbook because he was tired of never knowing the answers. And what happened? Well, he actually found himself interested in this cell transduction stuff. It was kind of cool how hormones knew exactly where to go. hey, who knew a plant could be a male or female?

And then he got into a really good school, too, which was the best news he had received to date.

But now, he expected a new best news he had ever received. That job was to be his.

And that's the mentality he kept as he walked into his interview.

The Donaldson Botanical Gardens were some of the most beautifully designed gardens you could ever find. The outside of this particular one was a giant stone structure that had ancient Greek-like sculptures crafted into the stone walls.

The inside was even more breathtaking. First, there were a couple of doors that led to the offices, where Hamtaro was waiting. There was also a gift shop in the main lobby. But then, once you walked past the large glass doors to the inside portions, you would be left breathless.

There was a large, reinforced glass ceiling which let in all the light the plants needed. Walls of dahlias; patterns of tulips and orchid dendrobiums; paths lined with peonies and lush, green grass as far eye could see.

Of course, there was also the outside portion of the gardens.

It was a giant road of massive cherry blossoms and stone fountains everywhere. There were Japanese pagodas and Arabic-styles geometric designs in the benches that lined the roads.

The gardens were a sight, and Hamtaro mused about how he could actually spend hours just observing everything. but he would never tell Oxnard or Stan or Boss that for then the joking would never end.

Hamtaro checked his watch. He was a few minutes early, so he sat down in the lobby. He was making double-sure that his black jacket didn't have any wrinkles. It wasn't everyday that this blazer of his was worn. It was right around then that he heard the door to the women's bathroom open.

"Are you sure that my nose doesn't need more powdering?" he heard Bijou ask as she and Crystal stepped out.

"You didn't need to powder it in the first place, but yes, it's fine," Crystal said as she pulled a small stray strand off of Bijou's dark blue jacket. It matched perfectly with her dark blue suit-skirt. Her hair was pulled back into a pony to finish off the professional appearance.

"Ha, Ribon, you're gonna need more than a little bit of powder to fix all that's wrong with your nose," Hamtaro said instinctively. He looked away as Bijou gave him an evil glare.

Then he did a double-take.

"What're you doing here?" he said as he jumped off of his seat.

"Just taking a tour," Bijou replied sarcastically as she ran a finger through the lower half of her ponytail.

"You said that you weren't coming," Hamtaro reminded as he stepped up to the girl.

"I changed my mind," Bijou replied. "How do you think I look, anyway?"

Hamtaro was seething. "You promised me that you wouldn't be here, and yet there you are. You're a liar."

Bijou stepped up to Hamtaro, making sure to click her blue heels authoritatively against the tiled lobby floor.

"I would've been a liar if I told you yesterday I wasn't coming. But when he had our little conversation the other day, I meant what I said."

"That's not fair," Hamtaro cried. "You let me think this whole time that I'd have no competition."

"You're always making fun of me for having things handed to me without me earning them. Now, don't you think you're acting just a bit hypocritical?" Bijou asked as she flashed him one of her sweetest smiles.

"There's a word for people like you--"

"Guys, shut up! I think he's coming," Crystal, who had been enjoying the show, said as she saw one of the office doors opening.

A young man, perhaps two or three years older than Hamtaro, Crystal and Bijou, appeared. Crystal nudged Bijou to show her that this was the "dreamy" guy she had been talking about.

The man had sandy blonde hair, and when he looked up from the files he was reading, Bijou and Crystal both swooned to see his aquamarine-colored eyes shine as he smiled one of the most perfect smiles Bijou had ever seen.

"Roger," Crystal said as she shook the man's hand. "Well here you goâ€|Your two interviewâ€|ees."

The man snapped shut the files he had been reading, "And I'm guessing that you're Bijou Ribon. Roger Asayo," he said in a firm voice as he extended his hand.

Bijou suddenly seemed to clam up and forgot to shake his hand.

Hamtaro practically smacked himself. This was his competition. He then came in between Bijou and Roger as he shook Roger's hand.

"I'm Hamtaro Haruna, and yeah, she's always that lost."

Bijou suddenly snapped out of whatever she was in and pushed Hamtaro aside. "Sorry, I was just noticing that you pronounced my name in a perfect French accent, and that's something very few people do on their first try." (Crystal mumbled "Smooth, Bij" under her breath.)

"Did I? Well, I took French in high school, but I never really attained an accent," Roger replied. He then looked over at Hamtaro. "I was just reading your résumé, Hamtaro. Did you really play soccer in high school?"

"Yeah," Hamtaro replied. "Did you?"

"No, but my brothers did-" at the mention of this, Bijou and Crystal almost squealed. There were more of him!- "What position were you?"

"Midfield," Hamtaro said proudly as he puffed out his chest.

"Why don't you two follow me?" Roger asked as he turned around and led the two into one of the doors. "I'll see you later, Crystal."

Crystal waved goodbye as the three Ham-Humans walked away.

* * *

><p>"This will be the office of whichever you two gets the job," Roger said as they walked down a hallway. The room was a decent size; it was definitely big enough for one person. "The labs are behind that large gray door across the hallway."<p>

"And this is my office," he said as he came to the end of the short hallway. He then ushered the two into the much larger room. It was very organized and had a few diplomas hanging on one wall. It reminded Bijou a little of her mother's office, actually, but that was ok. Roger seemed to have a very inviting personality that washed away all thoughts of Ribon Jewelers.

The two of them sat down in the two chairs in front of the main desk. Roger came around and sat at the head chair. He once again opened the files and started scanning them. He had highlighted certain parts of each résumé. As he read, Bijou couldn't help but feel that he looked so cute as his eyes darted along the words!

"It's amazing how similar you two are, and yet so different. You have virtually the same courses and both have excellent recommendations," Roger said. "Crystal certainly gave me two very deserving candidates."

"But you have to know, this job is not just walking around the gardens. I need someone who can measure germination rates, observe the plasmodesmata and stomata openings and make sure that the heptae of the mycorrhizae aren't getting too big, _but_ at the same time I

need someone who can handle paperwork and make sure that deliveries come on time. It's a relatively office-like job, except with a lot of time spent in the lab."

"That shouldn't be a problem," Bijou said.

"Exactly, that's what we learned to do in school, after all," Hamtaro added.

"Well, I just wanted to make sure that the two of you knew what you were getting into," Roger added as he opened a drawer of his desk. He took out two large packets of paper and handed one to Hamtaro and one to Bijou.

"Those are just the guidelines to working here. Standard stuff, really. What to do in case of fire, how to handle new plant arrivals, etc."

Hamtaro and Bijou glanced at each other as they stared at the packets. Didn't people normally get these _after_ they were hired?

"I know you're confused; let me explain!" Hamtaro and Bijou eagerly awaited.

"To be perfectly honest, your interviews happened yesterday when Crystal gave me your applications and rÃ©sumÃ©s. We had an hour long conversation"about each of you"and she told me exactly what I needed to know."

Hamtaro and Bijou once again exchanged looks.

"I just wanted to meet you before I said congratulations, you two are the newest employees of the Donaldson Botanical Gardens."

* * *

><p>AmyAddict1-I'm glad you liked the last chapter, and hopefully, you liked this one as well. And let me warn you, if you like plot twistes, just hold on! Thanks for the review!

Cappyandpashy4ever-You're right. The last chapter was sort of a bridge to the next part of the story. Actually, well, no! This chapter was the last part of the first stage of the story. There are two parts, but a few stages per part. There are three stages in the first part. We've just finished the first one. Thanks for reviewing! (Unfortunately, Komachi doesn't appear until the third and last stage.)

Crystalgurl101-I try to put a little bit of Stan and Crystal in every chapter. I'm glad you liked the last chapter! Thanks for the review!

Wishbone the Lover of Books-I'm glad you love this story so much! It's actually my favorite of mines. And I'm trying not to honk my own horn when I say that it does get a lot better. Thanks for the review!

By the way, this was not the 'big twist' that I've been hinting at.

When _that_ comes, you'll know. It changes everything.

So, I have a bunch of sisters, and they kind of read all my stories. They said, "Well, _Bijou: Behind the Perfection_ has a lot of humor and _Her Chuujitsu_ has a lot of deep emotion, but what does _Petals_ have?"

Well, the truth is, _Petals_ is a mix of humor and emotion. The emotion comes later in the second part of this story, after the twist. So just waitâ€¦you need to build something like this up. That's why it took five chapter to get to the job!

So please review? Please? Please? I feel stimulated when I get a review! Come on?

-CN

6. What Hamtaro Gets for Free

****CN****

****Petals****

****Chapter Six: **_What Hamtaro Gets for Free**
>

* * *

><p>Hamtaro and Bijou stayed quiet as they took in what was just said. Hamtaro shifted one of cobalt eyes over to the French girl, and Bijou turned to glance her emerald gaze at the orange-haired boy. Perhaps the most anti-climactic moment of their lives was just occurring, yet it was tense enough to cause them both grip the handles of their chairs in irritation.<p>

So they were now co-workersâ€¦|

"Are you two still interested?" they heard their new boss ask.

* * *

><p>As they both left the office, they were greeted by an overly-excited Crystal.<p>

"Well?" she asked excitedly, hoping to get some sort of feedback over what just happened.

Bijou turned to her friend and glared. "You knew that we would both get the job, didn't you?"

Crystal, apparently not noticing the anger in Hamtaro and Bijou's eyes, beamed. "Yes! Ooohh it was _so_ hard keeping the secret from you all morning, but I just couldn't ruin the suspense! Really, though, how was I supposed to choose between the two of you? You guys are both so good at all this science stuff and want this so much," Crystal clapped her hands together as she took a deep breath. "Congratulations!"

Hamtaro sighed and Bijou massaged her temples. She probably did have

the best intentions at heart, but she really did not understand if this is what she thought would be best.

"What's wrong?" Crystal asked at length as she glanced from Hamtaro to Bijou, noticing that they nowhere near shared the excitement she had. "You guys _are_ excited, right?"

"Crys, this just isn't going to work," Hamtaro replied, releasing a sigh yet again. "We can't possibly work together. We just get into each other's ways."

"It would just be harmful to your botanical gardens," Bijou reminded. "We never do well together."

The hopeful glimmer in Crystal's eyes fell, but she soon replaced in with another, more forceful, spark.

"Hmmpf! Here I am thinking that I'm doing something nice for the two of you, and how do you repay me? With some second-grade answer of '_We don't work well together!_'_. I wouldn't have asked you to this interview if I didn't think you were professional enough to be a part of my company.

"But apparently, you're not professional if you won't let some stupid little competitive grudge subside for the sake of work. That shows a lot about your character, you know!" With that said, Crystal fiercely crossed her hands over her chest and stuck her nose up.

"I would never let my personal life affect my professional life, Crys," Bijou reminded. "That's something my mother taught me one of the first days I went to intern with her."

Crystal still kept her face up and retained her angered stance.

"So that's why Ribon is not taking the job," Hamtaro explained. "Sorry to say, she just will not be working forâ€"

"You idiot! I never said that. If anyone, _you're_ not taking the job," Bijou retorted as she turned to face Hamtaro.

"Why me? How many times do I have to remind you that you're the one with all the money! Whose ever heard of an heiress getting a job separate from her own company?" Hamtaro yelled back as he faced Bijou.

Crystal, regardless of the inferno that was getting ready to burst before her, faced her friends yet again with an excited demeanor. She just could not hide the smile on her face.

"So you're both taking the job?" she asked. Hamtaro and Bijou both turned to her as if she had asked the most obvious question in the world.

"Yeah!"

"_Bien sur!_"

Crystal cried out in happiness as she came up and embraced the two in a hug. "You won't regret this, I promise."

Hamtaro and Bijou, startled by the hug, were both a little embarrassed over worrying her yet proud that they were able to please her, slowly returned the hug.

"This is so cool, Crys: You're my boss now," Bijou said as the three finally let go.

Crystal's face lit up as if it were the first time she were realizing this. "_Cats_! That's crazy!"

"You can give me a bonus as a Christmas gift," Bijou said excitedly.

"And I can fire you if I ever got mad at you," Crystal replied.

And so, Crystal and Bijou were off in their own little dream world as they thrillingly went back and forth with all the things that were now possible with their new relationship.

Hamtaro sweatdropped as he noticed how scarily happy the girls were now acting as he backed out of the botanical gardens' lobby.

* * *

><p>Hamtaro had no trouble finding an audience to explain what happened at the interview; the moment he opened the apartment door, Stan had bombarded him with questions. Hamtaro took a moment to sit down and tell the story, all the while Stan's face was becoming more and more depressed.<p>

"So you both got the job?" Stan asked Hamtaro as his face fell into his hands. He mumbled something about losing that was inaudible to Hamtaro.

"Yeah, it's a little annoying, but she'll be out of there soon enough. I mean really, do you think a girl like Ribon can survive in an office without her mommy guiding her through everything?" Hamtaro reminded.

"You have a point," Boss added as he sat beside Hamtaro on the couch. Stan made a loud sound into his hands which sounded an awful lot like he was crying. Boss and Hamtaro looked at the boy strangely before returning to their conversation.

"Anyway, girls need guys to do pretty much everything for them," Boss continued as he put his feet on the coffee table. "They can be so needy." Hamtaro nodded in agreement.

"She probably got the job because she was flirting with the interviewer," the orange and white-haired boy explained, leaning further into the couch.

"You mean she used the perks of being a girl?" Oxnard, who had been lazily flipping through the TV channels, asked from his position at the end of the couch, realizing that there was nothing good on. Hamtaro nodded once again.

"Hn. She could hardly even speak when she first saw him. You should've seen herâ€¦|disgusting."

Boss smirked to himself. _Kid, you can be awfully dumb sometimes_.
"So when's your first day?"

"Next Monday afternoonâ€¦ We have to work every weekday after our classes end and sometimes on the weekend," Hamtaro explained.

"That can't be good on your schedule. Don't you have some really hard exam to make-up?" Oxnard asked as he finally shut the TV off.

"Yeah, I do, actually. Geez, that's a lot of studying I'll be doing, plus a new job. Do you guys think I should become one of really organized guys who schedule in everything, so that I can, you know, get my priorities in order?" Hamtaro asked.

The four boys in the room, including Stan (who had momentarily stopped crying), stayed silent for a moment before the small apartment started erupting with laughter.

* * *

><p>Meanwhile, Pashmina started to pat the back of a heartbroken Sandy as the latter curled up into a ball on the living room couch, having just heard the news from Crystal.<p>

"There, there, Sands, you didn't really lose the bet," Pashmina reminded.

"But I didn't win," Sandy moaned before curling into a deeper ball. Crystal gave a confused look in Sandy's direction, but from the look Pashmina had on her face, she decided it was better to just drop it.

Pashmina rolled her eyes as she continuously tried to soothe Sandy. Why did everyone have to be so competitive?

* * *

><p>Bijou walked through the halls quickly, clutching her jacket more firmly against her frame as she approached closer to her destination. Was she scared? Well, naturallyâ€¦ She had no idea what to expect.<p>

What would happen to her? She was an adult, she thought, as she boarded one of the elevators. She pressed the button for the highest floor and leaned against the railing of the back wall.

Right, so she was an adultâ€¦ That meant she was allowed to make her own decisions, right? Of course! As soon as she thought this, however, a voice piped up in the back of her mind.

But you're not like most adults, Ms. Ribon. And just thinking these words made Bijou's face fall. She pulled her jacket more tightly against her, but it was no use, since she felt as though the cold was coming from her body.

The bittersweet part of coming here at night was that there was no one. It was abandoned, save for the few maintenance members tidying up the place for the next day. And, of course, a few other people. It felt a little haunted at this time of day. The bright lights in the halls and the jazz music echoing through the elevator just added to

the eerie illusion.

Bijou sighed. But at least she could ride up the elevator in peace without having to be distracted by a fellow passenger. It let her collect her thoughts for a few moments as she heard the frequent beeps every time she passed a new floor.

At last, the doors slid open, and Bijou stepped off. She continued sauntering down the halls, almost as if she were in a trance, keeping her head down and her thoughts remaining on the same thing.

She had walked this path a hundred times previously, and easily maneuvered herself, eyes never leaving the granite tiles covering the floor. This floor really was the most beautiful, with lighting that looked more like it belonged on a halo and large glass showcases lining the walls, displaying various awards and pictures.

She kept going like this until she reached the end of the floor, facing a pair of enormous glass doors with beautiful words etched into them. Walking through the doors, she took a deep breath, walked past the desk of the secretary, who had gone home hours earlier, and reached another pair of glass doors.

These had even finer etching than the previous glass doors with such beautiful designs that they often made Bijou's heart swell with pride. She took her hand and traced the 'R' in the word that was etched on the door for a few seconds before she collected all the strength that she could. She finally pulled on the door and entered.

She felt tears start to buildup in her eyes, knowing the disappointment lecture she was about to receive. Why was this always so incredibly difficult, she couldn't help but think, as she walked deeper across the room's spotless, blue carpet. She went up to the desk, passing the bookcases lined with history of the building and its founders, keeping her eyes once again, averted to the floor, and stood there as she finally looked up.

"Good evening," she stared right into their eyes, "mother."

Josie Ribon glanced, for a moment, at her daughter before returning to her files.

"I suppose zhere eez a reason why you came at zuch an 'our," her mother replied as her gray eyes scanned over the file's papers. When Bijou remained quiet, her mother turned the overly-large executive chair so that she was staring straight at her daughter.

"Would you care to zit?" her mother asked bleakly as she took a sip of her coffee, which had gone cold much earlier.

Bijou shook her head. The last thing she wanted was to be scrutinized by a woman who looked more like an exalted empress than a CEO when she sat in that giant chair.

Josie neatly folded her hands together over her desk, her expression unreadable. If Bijou remembered her etiquette lessons correctly, that was one of the true signs of a dignified lady.

"I came to tell you," Bijou said, speaking slowly for her accent had

a way of returning whenever she was upset, "that I won't be at internship next Wednesday, or any other Wednesday, for that matter."

She tried to study the face of her mother as she said this. It did not change once. That face—|that porcelain face which so many had said she shared with her daughter. Her gray eyes remained on her daughter as she spoke.

"Zoo you zheenk zat you 'ave enough experiience?" Her face tilted to the side with the softest elegance that Bijou could never master.

Bijou shook her head once again.

"Zhen why?" Her face remained still but kept that same expression.

Bijou gripped the back of the chair she had been standing behind. "I found out yezterday—" she stopped, trying to shun her accent, "I waz toldâ€|I got a job." She quickly said.

Josie's face tilted slightly more as her expression changed to one with a small smirk. "My zear, all zee money you get from zat job would be nozhing compared to all zat you will be given when you take over Ribon Jewelerz."

Her mother gestured gently for her to sit down, which, to those that knew her best, was more like an order to get seated.

As Bijou sat down, she looked at her mother apprehensively. "Eetâ€|it is not about zee money. I found a job that I really likeâ€|one at the botanical gardens."

This was perhaps something that Josie could not ignore. Her face lost its smirk as she lowered her head to stare deeply at her daughter. Her neatly-folded hands released from each other as they stretched across the desk. She placed her palms flat on the desk as she supported herself up.

"Where, Bijou Ribon, zid I go wrong with you?" she asked as she stood. Keeping her hands on her desk, she stared down at the daughter that she thought she had built up so wonderfully.

"I even forgave you for choosing zat sad, sad school over Sorbonne. Zat waz not eezy, but I zid it. And I even forgave zat you chose a science, not buziness, major. And here you are, zesting my patience again. How ungrateful are you?"

"Your fazzer shocked our family by zeeclaring zat _you_ would be zee heiressâ€|zee first girl born a Ribon to ever gain zuch a status! You put a mockery to 'is dreamz! How _zare_ you."

"You can whine and complain all zat you want, but when you graduate, you will become zee next CEO. We 'ave zeecided zat. Zo go a'ead, go, and take zhees job. When zoo you start?" She asked as she glowered down at Bijou.

"Next Monzay, after clazzez," Bijou replied as she looked down, not wanting the tear tracing down her cheek to be seen.

Josie took a deep breath as she stood completely up, letting go of the desk. "Very wellâ€|Zhen I will visit you at your new _job_ next Wednezay."

Bijou looked at her mother with fear as she gathered enough courage.

"W-why?"

Josie felt no need to explain her intentions to Bijou, for she turned her back to Bijou, facing the tinted glass windows that composed a whole wall of the office. Bijou stood with a shocked expression on her face as more and more tears fell down her cheek. Finally, Josie heard the doors to her office swing open.

Josie wiped away the few tears that had begun to form and promptly returned to the papers that awaited on her desk.

* * *

><p>"What would she possibly get out of visiting you?" Pashmina asked Bijou as she stirred the pot of boiling vegetables on the stove.<p>

Bijou shrugged, though Pashmina was unable to see this from her position at the stove. The French girl was sitting on the dining/breakfast table that was in the kitchen and had her knees brought up to her face, keeping a good distance from the stove (due to a horrible New Year's incident that occurred two years ago, Bijou was never to be let near the stove again).

Sandy walked into the kitchen, rubbing her red eyes. She sat down at the table and leaned against one of her hands as she stared at Pashmina's back.

"What's for dinner?" she asked as she sniffled.

"Vegetable stew," Pashmina replied. She took one glance behind her and looked at Sandy. "How're you feeling?"

Sandy remained quiet for a moment and then finally spoke, "Better."

Bijou extended her legs off the table and stepped off of it. She slid into a chair beside Sandy and looked at her.

"You seem to be taking the news that I have to be work with Haruna worse than I am," she observed.

Sandy glanced at Bijou and sighed, "I just feel for you, that's all." At this, Pashmina let out a small laugh.

Sandy, ignoring Pashmina, continued, "So what's this I hear about your mom visiting you at work?"

Bijou nodded. "On Wednesdayâ€|that'll be my third day of work."

"Why would she want to visit you?" Sandy asked.

"That's the million dollar question," Pashmina explained as she put a bowl of stew in front of Sandy and Bijou. "Where's Crystal?"

"Shopping," Sandy replied. Pashmina nodded and continued on getting a bowl for herself.

"She'll search for enough flaws to use against me, so that she can convince me to come back to Ribon Jewelers," Bijou explained. She took a sip of her stew and looked gratefully at Pashmina.

"She'll do anything to make me see that being the CEO was my destiny," she explained, playing with the spoon in her hands.

Pashmina's eyes scrunched for a second as lights went on in her head. "Bij, what if your mom suddenly decided that you're not CEO material?"

Sandy looked at Pashmina quizzically. "How? Bij has been taking separate business management classes and interning at the company since she was in middle school. Theoretically, if there's anything that Bijou can be, it's a CEO."

"But most of the time you've ever spent with your mother has been at the office, right?" Pashmina asked Bijou. The white-haired girl nodded.

"What if, when she visits you at your job on Wednesday, she sees the 'real' you?" Pashmina asked.

"Heke? Pashmina, I don't follow," Bijou said.

"Well, you're always saying that since your mom keeps pushing you to become CEO, she doesn't know you at all—so what if she sees a whole different side of you, which you would say was the 'real' you, on Wednesday?"

"What kind of side?" Bijou said as she stared at the girl.

"A side that you would not want to have as the head of such a major jewel company," Pashmina replied, her voice having devious undertones.

"How would we accomplish this? Make me look like a total slacker that doesn't take work seriously? I could get fired for that!" Bijou reminded.

"No, we won't make you look like a slacker," Pashmina said quietly.

"Then what?"

"Sandy," Pashmina said, turning to the girl who had remained quiet throughout this conversation, "you wanna dress Bijou again?"

Sandy's eyes regained the fire they had days earlier. "That's brilliant! Yes!" she exclaimed as she sat up excitedly.

Bijou's mouth, meanwhile, had formed an 'O'. She remembered the last

time she had allowed Pashmina and Sandy to choose an outfit for her. It was just a few months earlier and they had decided to go clubbingâ€|

"No way! The last time I let you two dress me, that weird creepy guy at the bar came up to me and asked how much forâ€"

"What Hamtaro gets for free?" Sandy asked. Pashmina let out a cry and started laughing.

Bijou's face turned a deep crimson color as she crossed her hands over her chest. "I can't believe you would say something like that."

"Cheer up, Bij, I think Pashmina's idea is pretty good," Sandy explained. "Once your mom sees you in the getup we choose, there's no way she's ever going to take you seriously."

"Neither will my Boss or anyone that sees me!" Bijou protested.

"Trust me," Pashmina said, "this plan is foolproof. Just come back home after classes on Wednesday, and we'll help you get ready for work."

* * *

><p>It was Monday afternoon, and Hamtaro walked into the office of his new job nearly 45 minutes ahead of schedule, only to realize that there was somebody already there.<p>

"Why do you get the new desk?" He asked Bijou as he stood in the office's doorway. The girl, sitting at a beautiful new desk equipped with a brand new computer and various other office equipment, smiled.

"Early bird gets the worm, Haruna," she replied smoothly.

There had originally been only one desk in the office, but since Roger had hired two people, another one was required. Along with the desk, he informed Hamtaro and Bijou that he also had ordered brand new computer and equipment for that desk, and it was between the two of them to decide who got what desk.

Hamtaro just kept reminding himself that she wouldn't be here for long and went over to the other desk in the room.

The two desks were aligned like an 'L' in the room, with one running against one wall and the other desk directly adjoining while running the length of the other wall. The room was painted in a blue color with dark wood desks. There was also a copier and a giant laser printer opposite the desks, with a fax machine neatly placed on the corner of Hamtaro's desk.

It seemed as soon as Hamtaro sat down, Roger came in. Bijou immediately bolted up and Hamtaro did as well, which just caused Roger to smile to himself. _New employees are the bestâ€|_

"I figured you two would be here early," He explained as he leaned against the doorway. Bijou's eyes seemed to widen as she watched him,

a sight that only seemed to go noticed by Hamtaro.

"You two don't mind starting right now?" Roger asked. Hamtaro and Bijou immediately shook their heads, and it was only then that they noticed their boss had been carrying a stack of papers in his hands.

"Alright, then, I'll start you two off easy. Hamtaro, I'll need you in the lab," he said, jerking his head to behind him, where the hallway led to a pair of large gray doors: the lab.

"And Bijou," he said, leaving Bijou giddy as she heard him say her name, "I'll need you to fill these out and make two copies of each. Leave one copy on my desk and fax the other ones to this number," he said as he handed Bijou the large stack, placing a card with numbers on top of the papers.

"Right," Bijou said, slightly startled by the weight of all these papers yet also slightly agitated that Haruna got to be in the lab while she had to do paperwork.

"Let me help," Roger said as he took some of the papers out of Bijou's hands and placed them on the table. "The Tax ID and Office Registration Number that you need on the forms is on the card." He said. "But it may help to memorize those numbers for future reference."

Bijou nodded. Greatâ€|so that just meant more paperwork, didn't it?

"If anyone calls, Bijou, just forward it to my extension, which is also on the card," Roger explained. "Pretty much every number you need is on the card."

With that said, he turned to Hamtaro, "Let's go to the lab."

* * *

><p>Hamtaro couldn't help but be excited. His first day and he was already in the lab! Well, naturally, where else would he be? Doing paperwork like the incompetent employees?<p>

He smiled to himself as he thought about this. Roger took a white coat off a hook and gave it to him, observing how well it fit him.

"Hmmâ€|we'll have to get you and Bijou fitted for a coat," he said as he put on a coat, which had Roger Asayo printed right above the heart.

"Why isn't she with me in the lab?" Hamtaro asked, curious.

"Well," Roger said as he continued to walk Hamtaro down the massive lab, "I really needed only one person in the lab today. You'll just be doing an electrophoresis; we suspect that certain insect DNA has been affecting a small family of sword lilies in the west wing. You've done electrophoresis in school before, right?"

Hamtaro nodded.

"Good." As they approached a small work station at the end of the lab, Roger briefly gave Hamtaro his instructions. The materials were all there for Hamtaro in test tubes.

"You'll probably have to leave the agarose gel until tomorrow, to let it settle," Roger reminded.

"So I'll be in the lab tomorrow, too?" Hamtaro asked. Roger nodded.

Hamtaro smiled. His life was suddenly taking a new, better direction.

* * *

><p>A couple of hours later, Bijou came into Roger's office with a copy of all the papers that he wanted in her hands. She would probably have hand cramps for the next two weeks with all the numbers and addresses she had to fill in, but she figured she had to start on the bottom.<p>

But it did irk her as to why Haruna didn't have to fuss with paperwork. She sighed. Was it because she was a girl? She had often heard that women were never paid as much as men, but that prejudice was normally found in the business world.

Either way, she entered his office, but she saw that he was talking on the phone (a call she had forwarded to his office just moments earlier), so she quietly placed the stack of papers onto his desk. She turned to leave, and just as she was exiting, she heard him put down his phone and call to her.

"Mr. Asayo?" she asked as she turned around.

Roger gestured for her to sit down, but she did not feel apprehensive or frightened like the way she was when her mother asked her to do so. But perhaps that was because she thought he was cuteâ€|

Roger leaned back in his chair, which didn't seem overly-large at all, as he watched her sit down across from him.

"Bijou, I was wondering if you would answer something for me," he said calmly.

"If I can, of course," Bijou replied. Roger smiled and leaned forward.

"Now why would an heiress, especially one to such a huge company like Ribon Jewelers, ever go for a job as a botanist?" He asked as he stared at her intently, as if looking at her would reveal the answer.

Bijou, excited that someone was finally asking her that question so earnestly, did not have to think about the answer.

"I prefer science to business. I always have," she explained.

"Are you passionate about this job?" he asked.

Bijou nodded. "Of course I am!"

Roger leaned back again. "I had doubts about your work ethic," he explained. "I was just a little suspicious why you would even need a job, but Crystal assured me that I would want to take you on as an employeeâ€|But you seem to have swallowed your pride and did the paperwork while I sent your co-worker to the lab, and you didn't have a single complaint," he observed.

Bijou was left a little speechless. He was complimenting her!

"I suppose Hamtaro will have to analyze several electrophoresis samples tomorrowâ€|It may be a little too much for one person to do, so you can go with him into the lab."

Bijou smiled and thanked her boss. Perhaps working here would be fun after all.

* * *

><p>All positive thoughts that Bijou had about her job disappeared when she took a look at the outfit Pashmina and Sandy had adorned her in the following Wednesday afternoon.<p>

While the other two were high-fiving each other, Bijou couldn't take her eyes off the mirror that hung on Sandy's door.

Her hair was taken out of its half-pony and had been styled by Pashmina to look messy and wild, just to make it look like she just got out of doing somethingâ€|something not so nice.

She had borrowed a pink blouse from Sandy which was meant to be extremely form fitting. And Sandy had decided that most of the buttons of the blouse didn't need to be done. But that was nothing compared to the little black skirt that the two of them had chosen barely hit her thigh.

"Guys, I look like," finding no other words and glancing at the spiky black heels that they had picked out, Bijou put her face in her hands and cried, "a prostitute!"

"No way! You look cute," Pashmina said as she came up behind Bijou. She started touching the girl's white hair. "Maybe just a bit more messyâ€|"

Bijou stepped away and touched her face, wiping off most of the makeup. "And exactly how much blush did you put on?"

"Enough," Pashmina said innocently as she shrugged. The truth was she had used nearly half a container of makeup to give Bijou that â€|_unique_ look.

"The point of all this was to show your mother that you are not CEO material," Sandy reminded as she pulled Bijou's blouse a little further down.

"I'll be fired if I walk into the office like this, and Roger said he thought I did a really good job with the gels yesterdayâ€|" The French girl started to moan.

"Hmmmâ€|your cute little boss won't be able to take his eyes off of

you when he sees you like this!" Sandy cried.

Bijou let out a whimper and sat onto Sandy's bed. This is exactly how she wanted to appeal to Roger.

"Sandy," Pashmina said in a disapproving voice. "I think it's fair to say that she'll be fulfilling Hamtaro's fantasy above anything else."

Bijou glared at the two girls.

"Have I told you lately that I hate you?"

* * *

><p>Bijou hated working with men sometimes. Pashmina had decided that, despite the bitter October winds, Bijou did not need a jacket. There was no chance of hiding her look.<p>

The security guard that worked in the parking lot pretended to check a meter but his eyes never left her skirt region. She practically gave the teenage boy who worked in the gardens' gift shop a nose bleed, and some of the researchers in the lab, seeing her walk past in the hallway, stopped and stared, never at her face. To her luck, they all just happened to be men. They would have to thank Roger later for finding such an interesting botanist.

She had purposefully come to work a few minutes early for she knew that Roger would be in a meeting until much later; it also gave her time to prepare her workstation for her mother's arrival.

As she was dusting Haruna's desk, because he was a stupid male pig and all that probably never heard of the word cleanliness before, a fax came in.

But because this was just not going to be her day, the fax got stuck in the machine. Bijou ignored the machine, continuing to dust the desk of her co-worker, but the annoying sounds that were coming from the machine kept getting louder and more aggressive.

In fear of attracting "men" attention to the room, Bijou left her dusting and stared at the machine. Part of the fax that had come in and was not jammed in the paper had little red exclamation points on it and was in urgent delivery to Roger Asayo. Why couldn't it be a different, useless fax that could be left in the stupid machine that was jamming up on the worst day possible?

She bent down as she opened the fax machine in hopes of fixing the jam. She didn't hear the door open, but she heard Hamtaro's surprise.

"What in the name of hell are you wearing, Ribon?"

"Hello, Hamtaro," But Bijou mostly ignored him because he was too stupid and Hamtaro-like to realize that she was kind of busy at the moment.

"You probably shouldn't bend over like that," Hamtaro said, never leaving his spot at the door.

Trying to sound like she couldn't care less, Bijou said, "Why, Hamtaro, can you see down my shirt?" she asked, still looking at the machine.

Hamtaro's cheeks turned a rosy color, but she didn't see that. "N-no," he stammered.

He tried desperately to not think of what he did see down her shirt, though.

"Then there's nothing wrong," Bijou said as she finally pulled out the fax. She closed the door and walked over to her desk.

"But it's ok to look, Hamtaro," she said as she sat on her desk, crossing her legs over the dark wood.

Hamtaro had no idea where to look, so he shifted his eyes to the rest of the room as he put a hand around his neck.

"I wore it for youâ€|" Bijou said, sounding a little hurt as she twirled a lock of her messy white hair in her hands.

"And you're not even looking," Bijou put on a pout. She came off of her desk and walked towards him, taking as long as strides as possible. She came face-to-face, actually, a little bit closer, with him and tilted her head innocently.

"You don't like it?" she said as she twirled around. Hamtaro glanced at her. He did like it. Maybe a little too much. He felt sick of himself and immediately looked away again, taking a step back at the same time. Unfortunately for him, though, he backed up in the wrong direction and found himself against a wall.

Giggling, Bijou took more long strides towards him. Placing one of her hands against his chest, she used her heels to come up to right below his Ham-Human ear.

"I knew you'd like it," she whispered. "Aren't I more useful than a secretary?"

Their faces were a few centimeters apart. Whatever Bijou was playing, she was winning, Hamtaro noticed, but he didn't really care. His eyes centered as they focused on her face. He looked startled, ashamed, and to be perfectly honest, thankful. Her hand was around his neck and he leaned down to kiss her whenâ€|

"Bijou? What's going on?"

* * *

><p>Electrophoresis is basically a process of separating DNA fragments depending on size. The point of the agarose gel is to capture the DNA in place depending on how big the fragments are.<p>

Yes, I understand that Bijou was a bit OOC in this chapter. Live with it. You'll see how important this scene turns out to be later.

Oohhhhhâ€|.but does this mean that Hamtaro might actually be kind of

sort of falling for our French heroine?

Hopefully, I didn't offend too many people with the slightly PG scenes. (But they weren't really that bad, were they?) It was just some natural humor showing through.

So please read and review, and of course, happy holidays!!

****AmyAddict1-****As for the bet, the details will probably be dealt with in the next chapter, but neither of them win. Thanks for the review!

****Crystalgurl101-****Once again, I really hope Crystal wasn't OOC at all. I just really want to keep the integrity of you character because she proved to be so helpful to the plot. Thanks for the review!

****Matt TH-****I'm glad you noticed the background behind the story. I was so afraid that many people would just read over that part, but it really is important to the story (why else would I waste the readers' and my time?). Thanks for reviewing!

****Wishbone the Lover of Books-****I really hope you liked this chapter! You're such a loyal reviewer, so thank you so much for all that you say to me! It really encourages me! Thank you!

By the way, everybody, can I know what you guys think the big twist is? If you're an incredibly talented detective, than you might be able to piece together the tiny, tiny hints that I have in the previous chapters. But I still would like to know your hypotheses. I won't laugh, even if they are really far off! I'm just curious!

oohooohhh...By the way, the secretary comment of Bijou's has to do with chapter three when Hamtaro insults her by saying something along the lines of how she'll only ever be as useful as a secretary.

-CN

7. In a Station of the Metro

****CN****

****Petals****

****Chapter Seven: **_In a Station of the Metro_**

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The poet Ezra Pound once visited Metro at La Concorde in Paris and was mystified by the sight of all the faces he saw. The beauty he saw in this scene was one of his biggest inspirations. It took him well over six months, but he eventually took what was originally a 30-line poem and transformed it into a 14-word poem in which even the six letters of the title are significant.

_ The apparition of these faces in the crowd;_

_ Petals on a wet, black bough_

- _In a Station of the Metro_, Ezra Pound, 1913

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"Bijou? What's going on?"

Bijou turned her head to the side, leading Hamtaro with a mouthful of snowy white hair.

"Mr. Asayo?" Bijou asked as her eyes widened slightly. Didn't he have a meeting to be in right now?

But Roger Asayo was not in a meeting right now. Rather, he had just walked in on a veryâ€|_unsettling_ scene between his two employees and absolutely horrified. Well, he was horrified until he realized what Bijou was wearing.

Then his expression became unreadable.

Bijou immediately walked up to him, her hands tied behind her back.

"Mr. Asayo, I know that my apparel is slightly _unorthodox_, but I assure you I have a very good reason for my clothingâ€|and about what you just saw, believe me when I say I was just playing a prank on Haruna."

"What?!" Hamtaro asked as he came up to the girl. "Thatâ€|That was all just a joke?"

Bijou turned to him and raised her hands up defensively. "Hey! I only need to deal with one angry person at a time, and you really didn't have a chance."

"I don't exactly appreciate that kind of clothing in the office, and especially not the lab. It's too revealing to practice safeâ€|safety cautions with," Roger said as he turned his head (something our little Hamtaro noticed), trying not to look at the girl. He was, after all, only five years older than her.

"I should fire you for this," he said, crossing his arms. He looked at Hamtaro. "And you, too. I don't need public displays of affection in the office, either."

"Are you really going to fire her? It's her first week and so far she hasn't been a complete pain and those legs!" Hamtaro immediately turned around, trying to hide his beet red expression and attempting

to get his brain to function.

"Change your stupid outfit, Ribon!"

Bijou looked at her boss wearily. Roger sighed and looked at the girl.

"If there's another incidence like this one, there you're definitely out. I've warned you." Roger couldn't find it in his heart to fire her, especially when he liked her little get up himself.

Hamtaro turned around and he and Bijou both bowed.

"Thank you, Mr. Asayo."

Roger nodded and quickly left the room, headed off to the bathroom to splash some cold water onto his face.

Hamtaro turned to Bijou, trying his best to keep his eyes focused on her face and not the rest of her scantily-clad body.

"You have got_ to tell me why you're wearing that," he explained.

"It's a really stupid story," Bijou replied as her face turned red. She couldn't help but feel self-conscious about how Roger must have thought about her now. And they were getting along so well, tooâ€|

"Well I'm zure we'd all love too 'ear eet!"

Bijou looked at the figure standing in her office door and felt the life go out of her.

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Sandy sat on the park's bench as she folded her hands over herself. Mid-October was relentlessly cold this year and she could tell there would be an equally bitter winter to follow.

But as she clutched her sweater over her frame, she realized that the cold was the last of her problems. What had begun as a beautiful morning had somehow become a gray threat that rain was imminent.

She glanced at her cell phone's watch and sighed. She should've come half an hour later, because she knew that the party she was meeting would never be on time. You would think she learned that after spending all twenty-one years of her life with him.

"Sands, my man!" Stan cried as he ruffled her hair from behind.
"Watsup?"

"Stan! Ughhh get offame_!" the girl replied angrily as she turned around and started swatting her hand at him.

Stan had a good laugh but eventually walked to the other side of the bench and sat down.

"You're like an hour late, you moron," the girl replied, not looking at her brother, as she tried to unruffle her hair.

"Come on, Sands, you actually expected me to be on _time_?"

Sandy looked at her brother. "Of course not."

"And yet you still came on time. Now who's the moron?" Stan asked as he leaned back onto the bench.

Sandy's hands dropped from her hair and her eyes became slits.

"Forgive me if I just wanna be punctual for all of my appointments."

"Ha! _Appointment_? Geez, Sands, we're just meeting so that you can own up for losing the bet," Stan reminded as he slid closer to his sister.

"Now pay up, sis."

"I'm not paying you because I didn't lose the bet," Sandy explained. She poked her brother's forehead, "Have you forgotten that already?"

"Well you didn't exactly win, either."

"Neither did you! We both lost _and_ won the bet." Sandy pressed her finger deeper into Stan's forehead.

"So what do we do?"

"Nothing," Sandy said as she moved her finger away from her brother. She pressed her back against the bench. "I guess we can each keep the money since there would be no use paying each other 150 dollars."

"I guess," the boy replied, shoulders slouching.

"Who would've thought that Hamtaro and Bij would both get the job?" Sandy asked.

"Yeah seriously. What a letdown."

"I'm surprised one of them hasn't already quit," the girl explained.

"Isn't it only their third day of working together? I give 'em a week at least, but two at most."

Sandy smiled to herself, although she knew it really wasn't funny. Well, yeah it was, but she felt bad for thinking that way.

"Stan, with what I made Bij wear to work today, it'll be a miracle if she isn't fired on the spot."

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"Mother," Bijou said to herself more than anyone else.

Josie Ribon didn't need to give her daughter's outfit another glance. Resisting the urge to roll her gray eyes, she stared straight into

Bijou's emerald ones and pursed her lips.

Hamtaro was a little lost for words. This woman, Bijou Ribon's mother, carried herself with such a presence. Just staring at her was a little intimidating. But she was almost like a twin to her not-so-intimidating daughter. And why was she here, anyway?

"I'm waiting, Bijou," her mother said as she came closer to the younger girl.

"Eet'sâ€¦|It'sâ€¦|" Bijou gulped. Her accent was returning, something that only happened when she was nervous. Or around her mother. Really, the two went hand-in-hand.

Hamtaro decided then to leave the room. He could more than easily feel the tension building up in that room, and he knew that it was no place to be. Still, though, as he walked through the door, he turned once to look at Bijou for a split-second.

Be careful, he thought. It almost sounded like a first-grader telling his crush to be careful when sliding down the playground's really big slide.

But, it wasn't like Hamtaro had a crush on Bijou or anything.

Bijou didn't see Hamtaro's short glance at her; she was too busy thinking of how to explain herself to her mother. Hamtaro quickly left the room.

"Zheesâ€¦|This is how I always dress for work," Bijou responded. Cats she was a bad liar, especially when around her mother.

But her mother had walked in on the worst moment possible! Simply hearing Bijou say that this outfit had a "stupid story" would immediately tell Josie that this wasn't Bijou's everyday outfit. Her plan of looking like a trashy worker so that her mom wouldn't make her CEO had been shot right there.

"Zoo you want to try zat again?" Her mother asked as she elegantly folded her arms over herself.

Bijou didn't say anything. Rather, she simply put her head down, letting her messy white locks fall down over her face.

"Well, zoo you want to know what _I_ zhink?" Josie asked, her eyes never once leaving her daughter.

No, Bijou thought. But she knew she had no choice but to listen.

"I like zat you are working in an office, _ma cherie_. I'm glad you aren't in some reediculouz lab."

Bijou decided not to mention that she had spent nearly all of work yesterday in a lab.

"Really, zhough, zoo you zhink I couldn't see zhrough your faÃ§ade? You 'ave been interning for me for 'ow many yearz? Eef you wanted me to zhink you could not be a CEO, zressing like zhees was not 'ow to zoo eet. Eet was a mostâ€¦|_eye-catching_ attempt, zhough."

Bijou felt her shoulders slump further. She didn't think she was going to cry, but she sure didn't feel good at all. Wearing this skimpy little getup was a complete waste of time, and her mother would indeed make her CEO when she graduated. Josie had most likely only come to "inspect" her daughter's workplace, trying to get her to quit.

"I zhink I 'ave seen all zat I needed too," Josie continued as she stared around the little office. "Eef you want, go a'ead and keep zhees job. But you know what will 'appen in a few months."

"_Je sais_," Bijou said quietly as she kept her head down.

"Oh! Of courze you know! And I also want you to know zat you _can_ make me proud, eef you try. _A bientot, Bijou_!"

"_A bientot, muzzer_," Bijou replied, keeping her head down as she felt her mother's heavily-perfumed self hug her. "Juzt remember to try, and I know you will eventually get zhere!" she whispered in her daughter's ear.

Once Bijou heard her mothers heels head down the hall, she lifted her head and sighed. She walked over to her desk and fell down in her chair, shifting due to the uncomfortable feeling of leather so high on her legs.

Bijou thought of the poem _In a Station of the Metro_. It was short yet meaningful. It was one of her favorite poems. If she remembered correctly, the poet was inspired by seeing beauty in the faces that made up a crowd.

Bijou kicked off her obnoxiously high heels and folded her legs under her; she grabbed a stack of tax papers that needed to be filled out. She grabbed a pen from her desk and thought as she started filling in the Botanical Garden's tax numbers.

Did her mother find beauty in things like faces in a crowd? Probably not. That was too abstract for the realm of her mother. But her mother was so incredibly brilliant! And so elegant and lady-like, too! There was grace in every movement that she made, something that Bijou attempted but failed at doing several times.

And as Bijou started filling out the papers, she rubbed her eyes (which were overloaded with mascara), not because she was going to cry, but because she was tired of living in the shadow of a woman she couldn't be. No matter how hard she tried.

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Hamtaro poked his head out of the lab's door and watched Josie Ribon's back walk down the hall.

He walked out of the lab and took his time in thinking over what had just happened. He always knew that Bijou would one day take over her family's company, but he often forgot that Bijou's own mother was the current CEO.

And Bijou seemed to know that fact all too well. He noticed the way she paled when her mother came into the room. He also noted the way her green eyes widened but almost immediately tried to settle down. The girl almost feared her mother.

It almost made him feel bad for her.

But her life was almost perfect, anyway. So what if she couldn't get along with her mother? How many people really had perfect relations with their parents?

As he came through his office's door, he saw her sitting in her chair. Her legs were folded under her and she was filling out some paperwork.

And even though she was wearing a blouse that was way too tight and way too revealing and her skirt really was too short for her own good, the way she glanced up at him for a second then returned swiftly to her work and the way her pen moved soundlessly and swiftly across the paper's surface, Hamtaro couldn't help but think there was a sort of elegance about her.

"So I'm guessing Sandy and Pashmina had something to do with this?" he asked as he went over to his chair and sat down.

Bijou kept her focus on her papers as she responded, "Mmhmmm."

Hamtaro tapped his fingers across the armrest of his chair, knowing he was about to enter a touchy topic.

"And I bet Mommy Ribon didn't like your new look?" Hamtaro watched tentatively as Bijou's chair swiveled around, her eyes focused on him.

"She didn't directly say that, but it was obvious by what she did say," Bijou responded. She shivered. Hamtaro realized he still hadn't had a chance to take his jacket off, though it was unzipped (he remembered Bijou's hand on his chest earlier).

It could get a little drafty in the office, he supposed. He walked over to Bijou, and, surprising her, draped his jacket around her shoulders.

She didn't say thank you, but when Hamtaro sat back down and saw her smiling at him in a way he had never seen her smile before, he didn't need to hear those words.

"I also bet a bunch of people liked your new look," Hamtaro mused, keeping his eyes locked on hers.

"The security guard by the short-day annuals seemed to like it. And one guy actually asked me out," Bijou replied, smile growing.

"Really? Who?" Hamtaro asked much more suspiciously than he wanted to sound.

"The guy who controls the sprinklers by the turtle pond," Bijou explained. She stared at Hamtaro's shocked face and added, "But it

wasn't nearly as classy as the time you asked me out in the cafeteria."

"I thought you had forgotten about that," Hamtaro said. "But I was pretty charming, wasn't I?"

"Very," Bijou agreed, half-laughing.

But as Bijou's laughs settled down, her eyes locked back onto Hamtaro's. He was thinking exactly what she was thinking.

They were getting along, and it was slightly weird.

Bijou looked at his jacket, warm and fleecy around her shoulders. Then she glanced back at the papers in her lap and sighed.

"I swear, Haruna, it's easier to talk to tax paperwork than you," she said as she started moving her pen across the paper.

Hamtaro turned his chair around and looking at this desktop's monitor.

"Likewise I can say it's easier to talk to a screen than you, though you are a lot easier on the eyes," he said as he logged on.

Bijou looked up, staring at the back of his chair. He was clearly flirting with her. First they were actually on good terms and now they wereâ€|

It was all too much for Bijou. She picked up the stack of papers in her head and started smacking them against her forehead.

Hamtaro turned his chair around when he heard the sound. He cocked an eyebrow as he watched her.

"What are youâ€|?"

"I have a neurological disorder that makes me hit myself in the head," Bijou relied before he could finish the sentence.

"Why?" the boy asked as he smiled at the girl's behavior. Ribon could be so dumb, really.

"Because it feels good," the heiress said sarcastically.

Hamtaro rolled his chair over to her and grabbed the stack of papers before she could hit herself again.

"Although I can easily attest to you having something wrong in your brain, I think you should stop," he said as he pulled the papers away. "I'll do the paperwork, and you check the online inventory for that nitrifying bacteria."

Bijou was not about to blow her opportunity to get out of paperwork, so she was about to agreeâ€|

â€|but then the lights started to flicker.

Bijou stood up quickly, and Hamtaro followed suit, the stack of papers still in his hands.

"â€¦a blackout?" Bijou asked, her voice just slightly above a whisper as the overhead lights continually flickered.

"Noâ€¦shhâ€¦" Hamtaro listened intently as his Ham-Human ears wiggled.

"What?" Bijou asked eagerly, trying to hear it too.

"I think it'sâ€¦yeah it's definitely rain," Hamtaro said as he looked at the girl. Her eyes widened as if Hamtaro had just suggested throwing puppies into a tub of boiling water.

"But it was so nice this morning!" she reminded.

"Maybe, but when I was in the lab I could see from the windows that the sky was completely gray."

Bijou went past Hamtaro and went over to his desk. Maneuvering her way around the computer, she climbed onto the desk. Lucky for Hamtaro, his jacket went much past her skirt, so with that on, he didn't have to worry about seeing something he knew Bijou didn't want him to see as he watched the girl lean over and look out the window.

"It's like cats and dogs outside," she said worriedly. She turned around and looked at Hamtaro as she slumped.

"Well, maybe the rain's bad," he reminded as the lights flickered above him. "But it's not like a hurricane or anything. It's nothing to stress over."

Bijou didn't answer. Rather, she stepped off the desk and went over to hers.

"What's wrong with you, Ribon? You get worried over everything," Hamtaro said as he went over to his desk and put down the stack of papers. "You were just like that in high school, too, remember?"

Bijou once again didn't respond. Rather, she just stared up at the flickering lights. She could hear the employees in the lab and the other little offices down the hall complaining about them.

"I wish the lights would stop doing that," she said. She was getting a headache from the on-and-off pattern.

And as if on cue, the moment those words left her lips, the lights went off.

Bijou's head went down as she slid down her desk. She landed on the floor and curled her legs up to her head and buried her face into them.

"You got your wish, Ribon," Hamtaro said as he bent down beside her. Even in the dark he could see the death glare she was giving him.

"Is it your claustrophobia?" He asked as he remembered their tunnel incident. He scratched his head.

"Yeah, it is," Bijou replied all too quickly. Hamtaro didn't notice, figuring she was too scared or something to speak normally.

"Well I guess just put your head between your legs," he suggested. Bijou did as she was told, although she knew this time it would be no use.

Her head quickly resurfaced. Having the blood rush to her head was just making her dizzy.

"You know," Hamtaro started to say, "we're not trapped like we were in the tunnel. You can get up and walk around the gardens. Maybe that'll help."

Bijou heard as the rain got stronger against the roof. She pulled her legs closer to herself.

"Thanks for trying," she mumbled into her legs.

"I think you really should take my suggestion," Hamtaro said. "Or would you rather me hold you?" he laughed at himself, though he knew he shouldn't be making fun of her in this situation. But he couldn't help it.

"Is that a joke?" Bijou asked quickly. Through the darkness he could still see her eyes, glowing almost like real emeralds, as she stared at him.

Hamtaro stopped laughing as his mouth hung open.

"Ummâ€¦"

"Forget I said anything," Bijou said as she quickly turned her head the other way.

"Would you like me to?"

Bijou turned her head at him for a moment. "You don't want to, so forget about it."

Hamtaro winced for a second, affected by her words. Then, the next the heiress felt was being lifted by her shoulders.

Hamtaro placed her so that their outstretched legs crisscrossed over each other, and he supported her shoulders with one of his hands, keeping the other hand on the floor.

"Haruna," the girl said as she stared at their positions.

"If it makes you feel better," the boy said quietly as he let his head go back on the desk.

Bijou looked down. Hopefully, it was too dark for him to notice the flames of embarrassment on her cheeks.

"Thank you, Hamtaro," she said as she relaxed herself a little.

What she didn't know was that Hamtaro should've been thanking her. Unaware that his teenager-like hormones would come back the moment he

put her over him, Hamtaro thought that he was doing the girl a favor. Like the good Samaritan that he was, right?

But at the moment, all he could think about was the feeling of her bare leg against his panted one, wondering if her skirt was riding up in this position.

Stupid Ribon and her stupid outfit. It was her fault he had been thinking like such a pig all day.

He should probably find a way to get Bijou off of him. But, for some reason, he felt the need to keep his mouth shut. He really wanted to hit himself, really.

Bijou didn't seem to mind, either. She was remembering how her mother used to hold her when she was really little. Before she was able to read or write or anything. Her mother would soothe her and tell her that it would all stop soon.

When her mother wasn't there, it would be a staff member like a chef or one of the cleaning ladies at her house. They would tell her stories about princesses while she stayed curled in their laps and drank hot milk.

Then came Sandy and Pashmina. Like her mother, they would tell her it would all end soon. They would stay up with her, giggling about the latest gossip in their collegiate lives, trying to ease her worries.

They stayed like this for a few minutes before they heard someone calling their names and walking down the hall.

"Asayo!" Bijou gasped as she quickly stood up, fixing her skirt while Hamtaro got up.

Roger appeared in the office door just as Bijou pulled her skirt down to the original short length.

A flashlight was in his hands, and he shined the light on his two employees.

"The other employees are probably used to this, but since you two are new, I figured you'd be a little worried. The electrical wires around the gardens are some of the oldest in the city, so even if there's a slight storm like this, we tend to get a blackout," he explained as he shifted the light over from Bijou to Hamtaro.

"So it's just a little storm, right? It's not gonna get much worse?" Bijou asked as her eyes widened again.

Roger put the light back on her, looking at her for a minute as something clicked in his mind. "No. They said that it would become an isolated thunderstorm in the next hour or so."

The way Bijou's eyes froze as he said those words, Roger came to a realization.

"Bijou, would you like to take a walk with me?" The man asked, still looking at the frightened girl.

Hamtaro's eyes narrowed as he asked this.

"For what, Mr. Asayo?" she asked, slightly startled.

"Well I just wanted to take a walk around the gardens. If you don't want toâ€¦"

Hamtaro stared at the back of Bijou's head, for some reason internally begging her to refuse Roger's offer.

It wasn't like he didn't like Roger or anything. But to ask one of your own employees to take a walk with you around the botanical gardens at night?

Didn't this man have any boss-employee work ethic?

"No, it's not like I don't think your offer is incredibly sweet or anythingâ€¦it's just the gardensâ€¦" Bijou thought about what to say. _The gardens are simply a dome of glass where I'll be able to see it allâ€¦_

"They're a lovely sight at night. I think you might enjoy the walk." Roger came closer to the girl and smiled at her. "But as I said, if you don't want to-

"I'd love to," Bijou said quickly as she came closer to him. She didn't know if she said yes because he was asking so sweetly or if she just wanted to spend time with her very handsome boss or maybe it was a combination of the two but she really didn't care. All she knew was that this was not a good idea.

Hamtaro's eyes were as wide as dinner plates as he heard Bijou's answer. Did this girl have any brains at all? Couldn't she see that their boss was completely hitting on her? But then he remembered when she first met Roger, at their interview. She was stunned by him. The girl was so speechless she could barely shake the guy's hand.

Hamtaro's eyes narrowed yet again as he realized Bijou was most likely enjoying this attention from Roger. How come when he suggested a walk his idea was shot but when Mr. Perfect Smile-Blond-Haired Prick suggested it she said "I'd love to"? And where was Hamtaro getting all this hatred for Roger from?

As Bijou followed Roger to the door, Roger realized something.

"You probably don't need that jacket. With all the transpiring the plants do at night, it gets incredibly hot in there," he said, noting the jacket around Bijou's shoulders.

"Right, of course," Bijou replied, shrugging off the garment. She walked over to Hamtaro and handed it to him, donning a small smile on her face as she turned around and walked with her boss out to the gardens.

Hamtaro went out to the doorway, jacket held in a vice grip in his hands.

As the two passed, one of the employees from the lab stuck his head out of the lab's doors and laughed to himself.

"Wow. Roger works fast. She's only been working here for three days and he's already got the new girl on a date!"

Another employee joined him. "Maybe it's 'cause he's the boss. But wow! Even in the dark I can see she's got some awesome legs."

"Yup. What I wouldn't give to just take that girl and-"

The man was never able to finish his sentence, for before he even knew it, a large jacket was thrown directly at his face.

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Bijou couldn't help but stare up as she entered the gardens.

It really was a beautiful sight at night: the sounds of the various ponds and fountains and waterfalls of the gardens created a background noise and all the beautiful short-day plants bloomed, little splashes of color against what would otherwise be a dark area.

And from the dome-shaped glass ceiling, she could see lights reflecting off the glass from nearby buildings. Well, they probably weren't nearby since most of the neighborhood seemed to have lost its power like the gardens did, but maybe the lights came from a large building from a nearby town. Either way, that was the light that glistened with the glass of the building. Roger had even turned his flashlight off. It was a dazzling sight.

But all Bijou saw were them. Billions, probably trillions of them, hitting the glass every second, causing trillions of little splattering noises in every direction possible.

It was indeed very hot in the gardens. Perhaps too hot. Bijou felt herself getting nervous and she felt an uncomfortable warm sensation sweep its way over her.

"Thank you, Mr. Asayo, but I should really go. I still haven't finished those tax papers, and I didn't even look at the inventory to check for that new bacteria sample," she said very quickly as she started to back away, her eyes never leaving the glass.

Roger looked at her quizzically. "But we just got to the gardens."

"But there's so much work to be finished," Bijou repeated. "I'm sorry, sir, but-"

She was cut off when Roger grabbed her hand.

Bijou stared at the man for what seemed like centuries as he returned her stare.

Was asking her hear supposed to mean something? Did he want to talk or discuss work plans or was he actually interested? Bijou's stomach did a somersault at the thought of someone like him being into her. But was this too fast? And what if this would jeopardize the respect

her other coworkers had for her?

"..I.." Bijou said, wanting to hit herself for her stupidity.

"Bijou," Roger started, looking down at her hand in his, "how long have you been afraid of rain?"

Bijou audibly gasped, her stare at the man becoming more intense.

"Whatâ€¦I mean, noâ€¦_what_?" she asked as she became more confused.

"If you're embarrassed of it, you don't have to be," Roger continued as he came closer to the girl, hands still together.

"I'm not, I mean, I'm not scared of rain," Bijou quickly supplied as she pulled her hand away from her boss.

"You know I could always tell when people were lying to me," he responded coolly.

"I'm not lying," Bijou replied. Through the dim lighting, she could see the man's face fall as he sighed.

"If you don't want to talk about it, then fine. I just brought you here to help you get over your fear," he said simply.

The heiress's eyes softened slightly as she kept staring at the man. Without thinking, she asked,

"And how're you supposed to do that?"

"Do what?" Roger asked quietly.

"Help me get over my fear!" The girl said indignantly.

"I thought you weren't scared," the boy said softly. Bijou froze once again as she realized her stupidity.

She walked over to where she knew a bench was and saw down, her head in her hands.

Roger walked over to her and sat down.

"I don't like talking about how I became scared of it," Bijou started to say, her mouth still pressed against her fingers.

"What's so scary about the rain, anyway?" Roger asked as he looked up to the glass dome.

Bijou thought for a brief moment as she looked up. She turned to her boss and sighed.

"The rain hides things," she said quietly.

"Soâ€¦how're you feeling right now?" Roger asked, keeping his eyes up.

"Like an idiot," she responded as her shoulders slumped.

"But not scared?" Roger finally glanced back at Bijou.

Bijou thought again as she looked up at the ceiling. Indeed, for a very short second, she had forgotten that it was raining.

"When you first came in here, you realized that there were about a trillion raindrops hitting the dome ceiling, didn't you? But you have to remember, Bijou, that all these drops will fall, but you will never get hit with one of them. This building has stood up against hurricanes and plenty of rabid storms, but it keeps standing because it was built to keep everyone inside safe."

Bijou was mesmerized. Of course she knew that she wouldn't get wet, but somehow, hearing Roger say it made her fear subside for a moment. She stared up at the ceiling, watching the drops come falling from the heavens but never actually touching her.

"I guess if you just keep that fact in mind, along with focusing on another feeling, or maybe focusing on someone else, you'll put the rain to the back of your mind," Roger explained.

Bijou kept her eyes up. She couldn't believe she could be in a room, designed to reveal the weather around it, when it was raining and not have a panic attack.

"It's strange," she thought aloud. She looked at Roger.

"Thank you, Mr. Asayo. I think you really helped," she admitted, staring at him in a completely revolutionized light.

Roger leaned back against the bench and watched the rain splash against the ceiling.

"Call me Roger."

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Well, my prom was the other day, and when I got home from all my fun little activities I was in such a good mood that I decided to type this for you guys!

And there was a whole lotta fluff in this chapter. I generally try to keep that stuff out of this fic, but I couldn't help myself. It had to be done.

This chapter was a littleâ€¦PG, I guess? Not too much, I think. But still. It's just to show the attraction between the characters.

But could this mean that Roger is falling for Bijou? And does Bijou really like him back?

The chapter's coming. Just wait for it. The one I've been talking about this whole time.

****AmyAddict1-****No, the twist doesn't have to do with Hamtaro and Bijou kissing. Or does it? You'll just have to wait and see!

****Bijou2384850-****Thanks for reviewing!

****Butterfree-****I like reviewers like you. You don't just compliment writing but actually take the time to see what you'd like to be improved. You actually critique my work, which is exactly what I want. So, I want to thank you for that. Also, I thought I put enough into the characters' thoughts, but if you think that needs improvement then I'll work on it.

****CappyandPashy4ever-****I'm not sure if Petals will be a long story. It might be. It depends on how I write the next few chapters. They'll either be in little installments with fast updates or long chapters with fewer updates. I guess either way can still make it a long story. With everything I have planned for it, yes, I believe it will be long. Thanks for reviewing!

****ChargingForwardBlind-****Hopefully, this chapter left you as satisfied as the last. Thanks for all the compliments and thanks fore reviewing!

****Crystalgurl101-****Yeah, I really love cliffhangers. But I decided that a cliffy wouldn't fit with this chapter, so I left it on a simple note. I'm glad that you're enjoying the story so far. Thanks for reviewing!

****Helsinki Demon-****I'm glad you liked Bijou's outfit ordeal. Thanks fore reviewing!

****Wishbone the Lover of Books-****Again, I apologize if you found Bijou's attire to be inappropriate. (Hopefully, this chapter wasn't too risquÃ© either!) But I'm really glad you enjoyed the rest of the chapter. Thank you for reviewing!

****Zeno Bell-****Bijou dressed that way to show her mother how underqualified she could act in an office, but that scene with Hamtaro was spur of the moment. It'll be elaborated more on from Bijou's part in upcoming chapters. I have heard of Zatch Bell, but aside from the basic plot, I know absolutely nothing of it.

Until the next chapter!

-CN

8. Leather Bound Memories

Oh...I'm so sorry if I made you think the "big twist" was this chapter. That's my fault. I guess I worded it wrong. So to put it shortly, no, it's not this chapter. You'll just have to wait and see.

****CN****

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>Petals

Chapter Eight: _Leather-Bound Memories_

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A young, Ham-Human adult stared up longingly at the plaster of his dorm's ceiling, a small smile gracing his face.

He had received good news today. Yes, _very_ good news indeed.

His attention shifted over to the branch scratching at his little window. His face immediately donned a little frown as he got off his bed and walked over.

It was unusually cold for a mid-October afternoon. So much so, he had to break out his winter jacket already, though, he had to remind himself, he probably was still not used to the climate of this area. After all, he had only been here for what, 4 years?

As he stared at the branch, he noticed the vivid, golden and red hues of the foliage, wondering in approximately how many days the trees would become leaf-less.

His attention then diverted to the desk beneath his window. He looked down at the papers falling out of his messenger bag.

Sighing, he started to neatly insert the papers back into the proper sections of the bag. He couldn't help but feel slightly nostalgic as he did so. This bag had held so many of his crucial papers and books and translating dictionaries over his past few years here, that to think all the leather-bound memories in his bag were soon to be just that, _memories_...

He shook his head and remembered why he couldn't stop smiling earlier. He looked over to the picture frame that was placed on his desk. A pair of brilliant eyes looked back at him.

He had a life, a good life, to return to. Yes, a _very_ good life indeed.

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Bijou furiously flipped to the back of her textbook, scanning the hundreds of numbers on the back of the page. She found the number she was looking for, and, after glancing at her notebook and realizing

she had gotten the answer right, she leaned back against her chair.

It was supposed to be her October break. That little perk all the college kids got due to the few months they had just had with of constant studying and no days off.

However, _she_ was not enjoying a break. It was just before noon on a Saturday morning, and Bijou had already been up for a few hours studying for her make-up, ridiculously hard chemistry midterm. The mornings would no doubt start like this tomorrow and the rest of the week as well as the next weekend, ruining any chance she had to sleep-in and enjoy her days off. "Well, days off from _school_ at least.

She had to go to work later in the afternoon, which just added to her joy. Perhaps Pashmina and Sandy had been right: Maybe she was taking on a little too much. She could barely handle studying for a test and work at the same time!

But she got her most recent chemistry problem right, right? So, despite the three blended coffee drinks filling her trash can at the moment, couldn't she just relax her head a little more and rest her eyes for a minute?

She felt her eyelids coming together in a most-welcomed fashion and felt a sense of drowsy euphoria sweep over her body, and just as her eyes shut completely

"Bij!"

For a split-second, Bijou's eyes widened into full circles. However, the rest of her body, not quite ready for any loud noises, was in a rather shocked state; that explained why Bijou yelped while frantically waving her arms as her chair fell backward and made a giant, "THUMP!" on the floor.

"Owww!"

All Bijou could see were blurred images of her ceiling as she lay on her back, her white hair sprawled and her back in dyer pain having just broken its fall against a chair.

Suddenly, Pashmina's eyes were looking down on her, replacing her views of the ceiling.

"Ooohh. Emerald and bloodshot don't mix," Pashmina commented as she stared at Bijou's eyes.

Bijou closed her eyes and resisted the urge to groan. Before she had time to respond, she felt Pashmina grab her hand and "with amazing speed and strength" pulled Bijou upwards.

Bijou winced and let out a little cry as her neck was nearly snapped off.

"Sorry," Pashmina offered meekly as Bijou sat down on her bed, rubbing her neck slowly.

"Is there anything in particular that you came in here for?" Bijou

asked tiredly, now rubbing her eyes to rid them of the apparent bloodshot look.

Pashmina stared at the amount of over-priced coffee concoction containers in Bijou's trash can and forced herself to not cringe. "Wellâ€¦" she started as she glanced back at Bijou (whose eyes were still horribly tired looking).

As her attention completely turned to the heiress, she smiled.

"Bij! What time is it?"

Bijou looked at the clock on her desk. "10:40."

"No, Bij! It's October break. _October. Break._ The time for all of us to do some long-awaited winter shopping!"

"I can't," Bijou answered quickly. "I have to study right now and then go to work in a few hours."

"But we can make it back in time to get to your job," Pashmina supplied hurriedly. She went over to Bijou and leaned in front of her, taking her hand in her own.

"Please, Bijou, please?" Her 'pleases' were definitely longer than they needed to be, Bijou noticed.

The way Bijou's eyes lowered to give Pashmina a sympathetic look, Pashmina figured out Bijou's answer.

"But Bij! They're having a major sale on cashmere sweaters at the mallâ€¦I'm talking 40 percent off!"

Bijou looked away, not wanting to say no when Pashmina was obviously so excited.

"Just take Sandy with you," Bijou suggested. Pashmina's hold on the girl's hand got tighter.

"But it'll be no fun without you! Please, Bij? _Please_?"

Bijou shook her head. "If I fail this exam, I'm throwing away any chance..." She stopped herself.

She wanted to say that she would throw away any chance at a good grade in chemistry, and therefore, she would ruin her college GPA and lower her chances of graduating at the top of her class (or at least the top ten percent).

But then a little voice went off in her head.

Come on, Bijou, what's the point of actually working hard in school? You've gotten good grades so far. And besides, who cares how well you do? You're ensured an amazing executive title within a few, short months.

The procrastinating side of Bijou had to agree with this.

Pashmina watched as Bijou turned her head to look out the window. The leaves had changed colors a few weeks ago, and very, very soon it

would be time to break out the sweaters and scarves.

Bijou bit her lip as she thought. Pashmina held her breath as she saw the heiress sigh.

"Pashmina, you're going to have to tell Sandy that-"

"Oh Bij please reconsider! You don't know what you're missing!" Pashmina cried as she grabbed Bijou's knees. "Come on, Bij!"

The French girl sighed again, almost scaring Pashmina with disappointment.

"Tell Sandy to get to the car in the next five minutes or we'll leave without her."

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"Why does it smell so bad in here?"

Bijou glanced up from her microscope to see Hamtaro leaning in the doorway of the lab, his shirt's sleeves rolled up to his elbows. She swiftly returned to her slide.

The obvious answer to his question was that he was there, and he brought his nasty stench with him, but Bijou was in the middle of something and didn't feel like answering.

"I don't know," she said with a muffled voice.

"I'm sure you know something," Hamtaro replied as he walked over to her table, his voice slightly tensed as he attempted holding his breath. "Why else would you have put a mask on."

He pointed to the surgeon's mask around her mouth and smiled, all the while being ignored on Bijou's part. Though he hated to admit it, she looked quite adorable in her little lab coat, examining whatever the heck it was she was examining.

"You know, Ribon, covering your face is a good look for you. You should see if that comes in a larger size," he said as he came behind her, trying to see what she was looking at.

Bijou's eyes remained focused on the slide. Her foot, however, quickly and quite forcefully, stepped back onto Haruna's foot and made him emit a rather pleasurable howling noise and bend over to use the edge of the table for support. Hmm, she chose a good day to wear her three-inch heels.

Hamtaro straightened himself up, though his foot was most likely swollen to twice its size, was in a ridiculous amount of pain. The nasty odor he smelled when he did so wasn't exactly easing his pain, either.

"If you must know," Bijou said as she took the slide off the microscope and walked it over to the other side of the lab, "the plants in the south wing have been taking up more and more nitrogen. The nitrifying bacteria we ordered from Russia is working really

well."

She walked over to the coat hangers at the entrance of the lab and pulled her lab coat and mask off, a clipboard now in her hands. As she started to leave the room, Hamtaro (with a slight limp due to his recently-injured foot) walked over to her.

"That's great, but it doesn't explain why it smelled so bad in there," the boy reminded as they walked into their office, Bijou tossing her mask into the room's trash can.

"They were doing some scent testing for some perfume companiesâ€¦I don't know," Bijou explained as she sat down in her chair. She started to speedily fill in all the necessary details into her lab report.

"How come you never have to do any paperwork?" she asked after a while of filling in numbers and chemical names as Hamtaro reclined in his chair, eyes happily closed.

"I did. About three hours worth. I just happened to be very organized and finished my work before you did," he replied, keeping his eyes shut.

Bijou mumbled something about him under her breath, but he didn't hear it nor did he care.

"â€¦Did you start studying for that midterm yet?" Bijou asked in her best attempt to sound nonchalant.

Hamtaro readjusted himself in his chair to get more comfortable. "I study when I have time."

The European girl looked up, her mouth slightly open.

"Is that enough time?"

Hamtaro grunted, keeping his eyes closed. "As long as you study whenever you can and not waste your time, like going shopping or something, you'll be fine."

Bijou returned to her report and decided not to tell Hamtaro what she had been doing earlier that day.

"Why? Have you started studying?" he asked, still peacefully reclining.

"Yes," Bijou responded, slightly annoyed at how relaxed he got to be when she had to finish this report.

"Good." His reply sounded almost bored, not really interested at all. Bijou bit her lip as she watched the boy rest.

His face seemed so different when his cobalt-colored eyes were closed. It allowed Bijou one less distraction as she scanned the defined angles of his face. He could lie so incredibly still, she was amazed. And his skin! It was almost as if it was carved out of one giant, fair-colored piece of marble. It looked so smooth and slightly unreal. She almost wanted to touch itâ€¦

And without knowing she had, Bijou realized she had wheeled her chair closer to his. And he hadn't noticed, apparently. He was still resting as still and peaceful as ever.

She reached out her hand. All she wanted to do was poke him, really. Just to show him that he couldn't just fall asleep on the job as if his life really weren't that stressful. Not when she had a whole October break of chemistry studying waiting for her.

But just as her hand came a foot or so in front of his face, he grabbed her hand.

Bijou gasped, but quickly straightened up her composure. He, after all, was still lying there completely unaffected. His eyes were still closed and he had yet to change his reclining position.

Except, now his left hand held her right one in a strong grip. Bijou tried to jerk away, but his hold was strong.

Eyes as shut as ever, he spoke, "I wouldn't do that if I were you."

Bijou's indignation went away as she suddenly had to suppress the urge to laugh. Did he really think he could make himself sound threatening? _ Ohhâ€|stupid, stupid, Hamtaro._

Just to get him riled up some more, she lifted her left hand and attempted to pinch his cheek or tweak his nose or do something to get a better response out of him.

However, his reflexes were faster than she had ever expected. Before she knew it he had his right hand around her left one and had swiftly repositioned his legs so that he was sitting upright now. His eyes were finally open.

And they were locked on Bijou.

Bijou attempted bravery as she tried to stare him down with the same intensity he was giving her. But the emotions in his eyes were almost unsettling.

"Really, I don't recommend it," he said as he kept his grip on both her hands. His voice was low. Again with the attempts to sound all cool and in control. Bijou's lack of bravery immediately returned to indignation as she realized this.

Knowing his threats were empty, she immediately pushed both her hands forward, despite his hold on them, and came face-to-face with the boy as she pinched his cheeks.

She quickly let go of him, smiling to herself, as she watched his burning gaze never leave her. Though her hands were still in his hold, she couldn't help but feel pleased and safe (though she knew he would never think of actually getting back at her).

She waited for his response patiently as her hands went limp in his, wondering what witty little remark he'd come up with. She was slightly startled when, still watching her intensely, he let out a small laugh.

"I told you it wasn't a good idea."

Bijou was still unfazed. "So what're you going to do, Haruna?" She pondered what he could do to her in an office.

"Are you gonna staple my lips shut?" she teased as she continued her stare.

"No," he replied calmly. Bijou was about to laugh, but he instantly pulled her up with him, sending both their chairs flying backwards.

"there are other ways of making you shut up, Bijou," he said as his hands slid up to her shoulder to hold her in place.

Her eyes shook as she heard him say her name in such a seductively low voice. But she knew he was still just bluffing. Just wait for it.

"I'll teach you that it's better to let sleeping dogs lie"

They were so close. She was pressed against him, making it a little difficult to breathe. But he was completely unaltered. The look he was giving her never faltered.

Bijou could feel herself tense as he spoke. Her lips pressed together tightly. In that instant, she realized he had never been more serious.

And before she knew it, he crushed her lips against his.

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Sandy looked up from her book, her eyes shaking slightly. Almost instantaneously, she stared at the corner of the little bedroom where an Old World globe sat on her bookcase.

A good friend had given her that globe many years ago. Yes, a very good friend indeed.

Her room was quiet and undisturbed like it had been for hours. So why did she suddenly feel this sensation?

It was warming and nice and familiar and she hadn't felt so comfortable in nearly four years.

Ignoring this new feeling, she returned to her book and decided to get this novel finished before the end of October break.

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Her lips tasted like sugar. It was the only taste he could come up with as he held her against him.

He hadn't expected to actually do it. But he couldn't help it. He hadn't told her that while he was resting, she kept occupying his

thoughts. And he didn't want her to know that in the back of his mind, a little voice kept screaming for this and so he could never take his eyes off of her.

But Bijou didn't move. It was as if she were frozen, tensing as much as she could the second he had joined them. This, more than a slap or a yell or tears, was incredibly unnerving.

Hamtaro released her and pulled away quickly, his head to the side. He remained standing as he watched her move.

Bijou backed away and sat down slowly, her head downcast. After a few moments of silence, Hamtaro sat down.

"Bijouâ€¦|-"

"Ribon, remember?" she corrected as she looked up at him. She didn't look sad, but she was definitely not happy by any means. Her eyes were brimming with tears and he could tell she was on the fighting relentlessly to tame them.

"â€¦|Don't worry, I think I've learned my lesson," she said softly as she sniffled.

"I went too far, I'll admit that," Hamtaro supplied as he leaned forward, his hands wrapping around their armrests nervously.

'No, you gave me a fair warning. Twice, actually," she reminded as she leaned back into her chair, trying to don a smile.

"But that doesn't mean I should've done it!"

He watched Bijou bring down her head and wipe her tears as quickly as she could manage. He heard her gulp down any sadness from her throat and he saw her straighten herself up as fast as was Ham-Humanly possible.

"As far as I'm concerned, you got carried away in the heat of the moment. It never happened, ok?" she questioned in an all-too-enthusiastic voice.

"It never happened," Hamtaro repeated, almost as if testing the words in his mouth.

"Exactly," Bijou responded.

"â€¦|We're never going to mention it again," he said.

"Absolutely not," Bijou agreed.

"And we'll go back to beingâ€¦|us."

"Works for me."

She could pretend all she wanted. The truth was, a small part of the way she had always thought of him had been permanently altered.

He could see the uneasiness in her eyes as she drummed her fingers nervously against the armrest. If she could lie, then so could he.

"I'm sorry."

She looked up. Her eyes widened very slightly as she put back on her not-so-real smile.

"What for?"

_For those tears. For making fun of you ever since pre-school. For doing something as stupid as that for no good reason. For knowing that your lips taste like sugar and knowing that I'm the last person on earth you want to know that fact. _

Hamtaro smiled as widely as he could, given the circumstances.

"Everything."

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Yeah. That scene was not part of my original plan. I actually had several details planned for my story, but every time I tried to write this chapter, I couldn't get past this one scene. It was so annoying! So then I just wrote it, and I hope I did well. I have never written such a scene between any two characters before.

This chapter did not turn out as it was supposed to. But it doesn't change too much at all in the long run. Oh well!|

But anyway, two guesses as to who our mystery man from the beginning of the chapter is!

And to my lovely reviewers!

****AmyAddict1:** ****Nahh!**|the big twist isn't this chapter. Roger does seem to like Bijou, doesn't he? It could complicate things, or maybe not. You'll just have to stay and watch (or read, better yet). But I'm glad you liked the last chapter! Thank you for reviewing!

****Butterfree:**** I know, AU's are no fun if the author doesn't reference the actual story's plot. But believe me when I say the

Hamtaro you remember from the show comes back, after the twist. The same for Bijou. But thanks for the review!

****Crystalgurl101:**** Ahhâ€|sorry to disappoint you, but the twist isn't in this chapter. I'm glad you enjoyed the previous update, though! Thanks for reviewing! (And if you have a theory for the twist, I'd love to hear it!)

****Shadow Bijou:**** You know, when the plot to this story first came into my mind, I dismissed it. I didn't want to write a love-hate story. But the more it came to me, the more I decided to humor myself and actually develop it. Then I had developed it so much, I knew that I just had to publish it. I'm glad you think I'm talented! It means a lot! Thank you!

****Steven:**** Thanks for enjoying the plot so far!

****Wishbone the Lover of Books:**** I don't know if this chapter was as plot-developing as I'd like. It actually didn't turn out at all the way I had planned it. This wasn't exactly the direction this chapter was supposed to go, but either way, I guess it could work out. But I'm glad you liked the last chapter! Thank you for reviewing!

Until Next time,

-CN

9. Love is a Misunderstanding

So here's what was supposed to be the real chapter eight.

****CN****

****Petals****

****Chapter Nine: **_Love is a Misunderstanding_**

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Pashmina didn't even have to ask who was there. The loud, consistent rapping at the door and never-ending rings of the doorbell could've only been oneâ€|no, twoâ€|people, much to Pashmina's dismay.

"Dexter, Howdy," Pashmina sighed as she opened the door, revealing the two Ham-Human men who were currently shoving each other. As they realized Pashmina was watching them, they immediately let go of each other and straightened up.

"Pashmina!" they cried together. With a quick glare at each other through the corner of their eyes, they both put out a box of chocolates in front of her face.

The girl, though slightly startled at first, smiled. Though these two's constant battles for her heart were very tiring and downright annoying, their efforts always ended up somehow seeming so sweet (even though she had vehemently denied every date request ever brought up).

"Come in. We're just about to have lunch," she offered, taking both boxes of chocolate and turning around.

Dexter and Howdy must not have been accepting an actual offer to eat with the object of their affections, for their mouths fell open. Nevertheless, with a little pushing and name calling, the two managed to come into the small house in one piece.

Pashmina lead the two to the kitchen, where Bijou Ribon and Penelope Chibimaru sat at a small table.

"What brings you guys here?" Bijou asked as she looked up from the textbook she was studying from. Though she already knew the answer as she glanced at the girl currently placing two boxes of chocolate on the kitchen counter.

"Well I just happened to be in the neighborhood," Dexter started to say as he sat down, "and decided it was about time I visited my dear Pashmina."

"Liar!" Howdy cried as he sat down across from Dexter. Howdy turned to Bijou and Penelope and explained, "He found out that I was gonna bring the lovely Pashmina a box of the best chocolate my money could buy, and I reckon he did his best to beat me here."

"Well I thought that I could afford the lady some fine quality treats rather than whatever inedible garbage you brought her," Dexter rebutted as he adjusted the glasses on his nose.

"Are you questioning my ability to seek out fine delicacies, Mr. Wouldn't-know-good-food-if-it-bit-him-in-the-backside?"

"Yes, I believe I am!"

"You four-eyed little weasel!"

"You incomprehensible ingrate!"

Bijou and Penelope shrank into the background as they watched the two men bang their fists against the table.

"Anywayâ€|" Bijou returned to her textbook and tried her best to drown out the fight in front of her.

"Not so fast!" Penelope cried as she poked Bijou in the shoulder. "You were supposed to tell me-"

"Take that back, you insensitive cow herder!" Dexter cried angrily as he stood up and pointed a finger out at Howdy.

"Make me, bowtie wearin' bum!" Howdy replied coolly as he folded his hands across his chest.

"If you don'tâ€¦I'llâ€¦I'll-

"-Sit down, Dexter," Pashmina ordered as if scolding a child. Dexter, though with a little hesitation, did exactly as she said, though he stuck his tongue out to Howdy.

"And apologize to Dexter, Howdy," Pashmina ordered again as she put a plate of food in front of everybody.

"â€¦errâ€¦Sorry," Howdy quickly spat out, turning his head so he didn't have to look at the silver-haired boy.

"Now that wasn't so hard, was it?" the girl cried, clapping her hands together. She went to her own seat and sat down, however, once she realized she had Dexter on her left side and Howdy on her right, she wondered if this was the best place to have chosenâ€¦

"Pashmina, I don't think you understand," Dexter said after a few moments of silent eating.

"Heke? What don't I understand?" Pashmina replied.

"That you've been playing this game with us for years!" Dexter said as he gestured from himself to Howdy. "You're going to have to tell us which one you chose, even if it breaks that mongrel's heart."

Howdy's mouth fell open, but before he could reply to Dexter's comment, Pashmina started to speak.

"I'm not playing any game, you guys! I've told you from the very beginning: I'm not interested in either of you!" Pashmina said cheerfully as she took another bite of her food.

"But we've declared our love for you so many times I can't even count!" Howdy reminded.

"That's not a significant amount of times for you, Howdy," Dexter replied, smirking.

"Enough, guys," Pashmina said, holding out her hand. "Let's just enjoy our lunch. Besides, the two of you don't seem to get that your love is a misunderstanding."

Bijou and Penelope smiled to themselves and decided that if Pashmina knew how to handle this, than it was simply best to continue watching this scene unfold.

"What?...I'm afraid I don't understand," Dexter answered at length.

"What he said," Howdy added as he looked at his beloved.

"It's simple, guys," Pashmina added. She took a sip of her water before continuing.

"You guys love the fact that I'd choose you over the other, not me.

You're more in it for the competition and thrill of winning. I can't say I mind, though, since I'm not really interested."

The two boys glanced from each other to the woman between them, mouths a perfect O-shape.

"But-

"That's not-

"Don't worry, guys. I still think your efforts are sweet, and they're appreciatedâ€|most of the time," Pashmina said nonchalantly as she continued eating her food.

"_Speaking_ of efforts in winning girls' hearts," Penelope started to say. Bijou immediately stopped eating as she glanced up at the teenager who was currently smirking at her.

"I can't believe he took you to the botanical gardens while it was raining," Pashmina added. _And he helped you deal with your fearâ€|_ She thought inwardly, happy for her friend.

"Ohh it must've been so romantic!" Penelope exclaimed.

"I'm not sure that was the mood he was going for," Bijou explained sheepishly.

"Of course it wasâ€|you said he even grabbed your hand!" Penelope reminded.

The French girl blushed as she looked at the younger girl. "Didn't you come here because you needed help on your biology homework?"

"But this is so much more interesting," the sixteen-year-old Ham-Human explained.

"Well you know all there is to know, then," Bijou said as she looked down at her plate.

"But you said he told you something else," Pashmina reminded from across the table.

"Spill! We've been waiting long enough," Penelope cried as she looked at Bijou with wide, expecting eyes.

Bijou's blush deepened. "It was nothing."

"Yeah it was! It must have been to make your face turn so red," Penelope exclaimed giddily. "Come on, tell us!"

"I'd rather not," Bijou said meekly as she fiddled with her fork.

"Yes you would. Come on, Bij," Pashmina egged, forgetting all about her food as she leaned forward. Even Dexter and Howdy, who were pretending to not care, turned to Bijou and awaited her answer.

"Afterâ€|" Bijou started, the red on her face turning to a bright

pink color, "After he said that I should call him by his first name-"
-Here an audible gasp escaped from Pashmina and Penelope's lips- "he
asked if I would like to have coffee with him
sometimeâ€|"

"Hamtaro?" Dexter asked. "Don't you already call him by his first
name?"

At this Bijou's cheeks regained her red color, making her usually
pale face look sunburned. "Iâ€|Iâ€|"

Truth was, yesterday's incident hadn't left Bijou's mind. Whenever
she thought about it she had to do her best to shake it from her
mind. She had been doing a good job of forgetting about it until
Dexter just reminded her.

"She's talking about her new boss Roger," Pashmina explained to the
boy. Dexter, though still confused for a completely new reason,
nodded nonetheless.

"What did you say?" Penelope cried as she grabbed Bijou's sleeve.
"Tell me you did not say 'no'."

"I didn't say no," Bijou said. She sighed and her shoulders slumped.
"I said 'maybe'." She looked across the table, almost as if asking if
her decision was approved.

"But Bij," Pashmina replied, her voice inkling of disappointment, "if
he's asking you out on dates on your third day of work, he must be
really interested."

"I thought you said he was really hot!" Penelope said as she hit
Bijou's arm. "Why would you let this guy slip through your
fingers?!"

"Well I didn't want to say 'yes' immediately. And he is cute, but I
don't want to just jump into things. I have too much on my plate as
it is," she explained. She looked down at the textbook that was now
resting in her lap. Her make-up midterm would be coming up soon, not
to mention her mother still wanted her to come to the company
whenever she could, and work, and the rest of her classes would
resume after her October break in just a few daysâ€|

"Butâ€|once things settle down in your lifeâ€|" Penelope trailed off,
letting Bijou finish the rest.

"Then I'd be a fool to reject him," Bijou said as she smiled, a
most-welcomed blush coming on as she thought of her
boss.

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"Hmâ€|now see, Pashmina's a tricky one," Stan said as he tapped his
chin. Dexter and Howdy leaned forward, hanging on his words. "And you
said the chocolates didn't work?"

"She said our efforts were 'appreciated'," Howdy quoted.

"Ooohh, that always means she's not interested," Stan explained.

"That's precisely what Pashmina said, but we don't believe her," Dexter responded.

"Yeah! I reckon with how much time we've put in, she's bound to love one of us!"

"I think you guys should just give up and move on," Hamtaro said. The three boys on the living room couch looked over to the boy studying at the kitchen counter. When he felt three pairs of eyes grinding into him, he looked up again and stared at group of males.

"What? I'm just saying that if she's not interested there's no point in wasting your time," Hamtaro explained as he looked back down at his book.

"No girl is unbreakable. We've just gotta find a way to reel in Pashmina," Stan explained as he returned to Dexter and Howdy.

"But maybe Hamtaro's right: We've tried for years and she's never given us any hope that she might actually return our feelings," Dexter complained as he put his face in his hands.

"Noâ€|my sister just has a way of making friends with girls who just play hard to get. Pashmina and Bijou have never given me a second glance, either. I mean come on! Look at me!" Stan exclaimed. "I don't know what it takes to get through to them sometimes."

"Maybe you're right," Howdy explained as he rubbed his chin thoroughly. "I mean Bijou said she was interested in that Roger fellow, but all she said was 'maybe' when he asked her."

Hamtaro immediately looked up. At the same time, Stan's eyebrows furrowed.

"What're you two talking about?" the strawberry-blonde boy asked.

"Well while we were visiting Pashmina a little while ago, Bijou, Penelope and of course my lovely Pashmina were talking about Bijou's new boss."

"And he seems to be pretty sweet on her," Howdy added.

"Wait, wait, wait a minuteâ€|" Stan held out his hands as he thought. Finally he reached over to the recliner, grabbed the remote out of Oxnard's hands and turned off the T.V.

"Hey! I was watching that," the boy replied.

"Not now, Oxy," Stan quickly supplied. His attention returned to Dexter and Howdy.

"So you're telling me you two were front and center when these girls were talking about their _romantic_ lives?"

"Well technically it was just Bijou-"

"-Doesn't matter!" Stan put a hand up to his temples. "You guys don't understand the once-in-a-lifetime-opportunity you had! When do guys _ever_ get to listen to girl talk?"

"Yeah guys, a real rare opportunity," Hamtaro said more to himself than anyone else as he walked around the kitchen counter and sat down in the closest seat.

"So what did Bijou say?" Stan encouraged.

".ummâ€¦" The gentleman in Dexter took over as he scratched his head nervously. "I'm not sure she'd want us revealing this. It took some persuasion to get it out of her in the first place."

"Ugh, Dexter! You can't say something like that and not follow up. Now tell us everything!" Stan ordered.

Dexter and Howdy looked between each other and then sighed.

"â€¦She said that Roger guy took her out to the Botanical Gardens when it was rainin'," Howdy started to say.

"Penelope and Pashmina seemed to think it was romantic," Dexter supplied.

"But you said Roger asked her something," Hamtaro said, leaning forward. Stan gave Hamtaro an understanding look that only went noticed by Dexter.

"Let's seeâ€¦" After he said she could call him by his first name, Bijou said he asked her out for coffee," Howdy enlightened.

Hamtaro's eyes widened slightly as he sat up straight.

"But she said 'maybe', right?" he asked as he stared from Dexter to Howdy.

"Yes, but that's only because she said she has too much to deal with at the moment," the bowtie-wearing Ham-Human explained.

"She said she'd be outta her mind to reject him once her schedule cleared up a bit."

"Surrounding the girl with a romantic atmosphere, asking to be called by a more intimate term and then asking her out. This guy knows what he's doing," Oxnard commented.

"And Bijou doesn't seem to mind all that much," Howdy added.

Hamtaro looked away and seemed to be deep in thought for a moment.

"He's your boss, too, isn't he, Hamtaro?" Dexter asked. "Have you noticed at all?"

"What? Ohâ€¦" Hamtaro rubbed his neck nervously as he put on a smile. "Not really. Though I don't pay attention to Ribon's love life all that much."

Stan glanced at the clock. "Don't you gotta get to work soon, Hamtaro?"

Hamtaro looked at the time as well and nodded. "Yeah actually."

And as Hamtaro got up and went to his room to get ready, Stan stared after his friend with a mixture of frustration and sadness.

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Hamtaro was greeted by the site of Bijou waiting eagerly at her desk.

"Where have you been? You're like twenty minutes late," she reminded as she grabbed his wrist.

"Uhhâ€|sorry, there was traffic, and, where are we going?" he asked as she started pulling him out of the room.

"Mr. Asayo said he wanted to see us ASAP," she explained as she walked him down the long hallway.

Hmmp. Don't you mean Roger? A sinister little voice inside Hamtaro's mind asked.

"Do you know what about?" Hamtaro asked as the two came to a stop in front of their boss's door. Bijou let go of the man and started to run a hand through her hair and giving herself a good look-over. It took Hamtaro all the strength he had not to roll his eyes.

"No, he just said to meet him in his office as soon as you arrived," Bijou explained. Taking a deep breath, she knocked gently on his door.

"Come in," their boss answered.

Bijou opened the door and went in, Hamtaro following closely.

"Ahh..there are my two newest botanists," Roger said excitedly as he gestured for the two of them to sit down. Hamtaro and Bijou sat down, though Roger was still standing as he observed them. He smiled at Hamtaro and then turned his attention to Bijou, doing which caused a small spark to come into his eyes and his smile to grow just a tad bit wider.

Hamtaro wanted to wring his neck. He glanced over at Bijou to see her white skin turn a lovely shade of rose pink under their boss's stare. Oh he wanted to wring his neck _so bad_.

As their Boss sat down, he pulled out an envelope from the upper drawer of his desk. Hamtaro's eyes narrowed as he stared at the envelope, wondering what was going on.

"I just received a telephone call from Madagascar earlier this afternoon," Roger started to say as he played with the envelope in his hands. A scowl appeared on his normally incredibly handsome face

as he thought for a moment.

"I'm sure the two of you know that we've been renovating the South Wingâ€|Well, we're doing that for the arrival of the Colville's Glory Tree. I don't know if you two know much about tropical plantsâ€|" Roger trailed off, looking at his two employees.

"It's also known as the Whip Tree. It makes highly nectarous, orange blossoms and it can only grow in moist soil," Hamtaro added quickly, wanting to show Roger exactly how much he knew.

"Ummâ€|you're right, Hamtaro," Roger added. Roger knew a lot about the plant, and to be honest, he was impressed with Hamtaro's knowledge. Butâ€|was it just him, or did Hamtaro have a slight attitude in his voice?

Bijou looked at Hamtaro in surprise for a few seconds before she returned her attention to her boss.

"Well the tree was supposed to arrive in two weeks, but due to a landslide that happened in the tree's village in Madagascar a couple of days ago, it needs to be delivered within the next two days.

"I was supposed to go to the Annual Donaldson Botanical Garden Botanist Convention." Roger paused, taking a deep breath. "But my signature is required on the papers when the tree arrives. So I thought that I should send two botanists as my replacement." He glanced from Hamtaro to Bijou. "And I figured, since you two are new and haven't been given an opportunity like this beforeâ€|why not you guys?"

It took all of Hamtaro's willpower to not gasp as his cobalt eyes widened.

He was being asked to represent their little botanical gardens at a major convention. It made Hamtaro's newfound hatred for Roger subside for a moment.

But that was just for a moment.

"When and where is this convention, Mr. Asayo?" Bijou asked calmly, looking completely unfazed as she stared up at her boss.

"Well," Roger looked at the girl in a way that he had never looked at any other employee before, liking the fact that her attention was completely focused on him. "The convention's in Kyoto. The plane leaves tomorrow and you'd be back in two days, so I believe you two will still be on October break by the time you return."

"I see," Bijou said quietly as she looked down. Roger wondered what had happened to her all of a sudden, but then he remembered the envelope in his hands.

He opened it and pulled out what seemed to be airplane tickets. He handed one to both of his employees.

"You two are interested, aren't you?" he asked cautiously, his eyes locked on the lack of smile on Bijou's face.

"Definitely, Mr. Asayo, thank you," Hamtaro said as he stood up and

bowed slightly before his boss. Bijou stood up and followed suit.

"Of course, Mr. Asayo," Bijou added while her head was still lowered. As she resurfaced, she put on a smile, though something in her eyes seemed a little off. They weren't as excited as the emerald beauties Roger had often seen and found himself to be so very attracted to.

"Good. Alright then, that's all," Roger said as he dismissed the two. However, a small thought hit him.

As Hamtaro and Bijou turned to leave, Roger called out.

"Bijou, could you stay for a moment?"

His back still to his boss, Hamtaro's head turned very slightly to the side as his eyes lowered. He paused for the shortest of seconds before he left.

"Of course, Mr. Asayo."

Once Hamtaro had left and closed the door behind him, Bijou turned around to her boss.

"Is everything alright, Bijou?" Roger asked, now standing up.

Bijou looked confused. "Yes, sir."

Roger walked around the side of his desk and sat down on a corner of it.

"You didn't seem so excited when I talked about going to the convention," he reminded.

"Oh, well," Bijou started to say as she looked at the ticket in her hands. "Hamtaro's probably never been on one, but I've been on several with my mother so it's not a huge deal for me."

She looked down again, hoping that she didn't disappoint him.

"Yeah, you probably have," Roger mused as he looked off to the side. Then another thought came into his mind. He slid off his desk and approached the girl.

Startled by his closeness, Bijou looked up. Roger put a hand under her chin and brought her eyes up to look into his aquamarine orbs.

His touch was soft and gentle, and, though Bijou's cheeks were painted with that beautiful shade of pink again, she wasn't the least bit uncomfortable.

"What happened to calling me Roger?" he asked as he stared into her.

Bijou smiled. "Well it'd be kinda weird calling you that in front of Hamtaro."

Roger returned her smile. "Probably. Soâ€|when I asked you out for

coffee the other dayâ€| " He let go of her and put a nervous hand at the back of his neck.

"I know you said 'maybe'â€|but maybe when you get back from your trip and we get the South Wing all finishedâ€|" Another, much more unsettling thought hit him as he realized something.

"I'm not being too forward, am I? I mean I don't want you to think I'm harassing you or anything. No, that's the last thing-" He backed away from the girl, fear reflecting in his eyes.

"You're not," Bijou quickly cut in as her smile grew. "And I don't mind, Roger."

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Who in the name of hell did Roger Asayo think he was?

Though he should've been in the lab, examining something or other, Hamtaro was sitting at his desk scribbling weird drawings of a little chibi man that looked uncannily like his boss getting hit with a car on a piece of printer paper.

He had to be whatâ€|five years older than Bijou? He probably had much more experience than her, and was probably thinking of taking advantage of her. And Ribon was too stupid to realize this and punch him.

But then againâ€|as Hamtaro stopped his vicious little illustrations for a second to glance over at the ticker on his desk, his mood became a little better.

His first business trip! His first request to travel and represent this particular botanical garden! It was an incredibly joyful feeling, especially since he hadn't been working in the gardens for very long at all.

He was taken away from his thoughts, though, as the door to his office opened and Ribon came in, pink-cheeked and smiling.

Hamtaro would've asked what Roger wanted, but he thought against it as he watched Bijou sit down.

"So I guess we better start packing tonight," Hamtaro said as he lazily swiveled his chair to face the girl.

Bijou didn't get what he was thinking about for a second until she looked down to see the ticket that was currently resting in her lap. As she picked it up, she examined it as if never seeing a ticket before.

"I suppose. Though I can hardly find the situation exciting," she explained as she sighed. Then she groaned thinking about how little time she would have to study and then pack, too.

"Why not?" Hamtaro asked. "I mean doesn't this trip show us that we're rising in rank?"

"Not really," Bijou replied. "If anything, Haruna, this shows us exactly where we stand."

"I don't follow," the boy responded as he leaned back in his chair.

"No surprise there," she retorted. "Basically, only the lowest of the employees get to go on these things--"

"But Roger said he was going to go if the tree situation hadn't changed," Hamtaro reminded.

"Maybe, but that's probably because this is his first year as head botanist and he wants to make a good show. But mother only went on trips that involved making major corporate decisions such as deals with other companies. And most of the time they were overseas, not just to Kyoto," Bijou explained.

"Well I'm sorry if my mother wasn't a CEO that could afford the luxuries of traveling across the world," Hamtaro said, "but I find this to be an exciting opportunity."

Bijou shrugged and turned her chair around.

And that's when Hamtaro heard itâ€|

Bijou was hummingâ€|

Humming!

It wasn't barely audible, and he had to admit to straining his ears to hear it, but she was repeating a soft melodyâ€"a love song that Hamtaro heard once or twiceâ€"to herself as she filled out some paperwork.

Without warning, Hamtaro got up and left the office, heading towards the lab, thankful that he didn't ask what Roger wanted.

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Ok, so there's what the actual chapter eight was. It's my little gift to you before I head off for college in a few days.

And yes, the mystery person in chapter eight's beginning was indeed Maxwell. Oh when and how does he come in? (Hint: read chapter three's author's note at the end of the chapter!)

****AmyAddict1-***No, as you can see, the twist wasn't this chapter. And you were right, it was Maxwell. Thanks for the review!

****CantChangeFate-***Thank you! Though my writing skills are only "good" (notice I use the term very loosely) due to years of writing fiction. Thanks for the review!

****ChargingForwardBlind-***Thank you for reviewing! I can't wait until you come out with your new story, by the way.

****Crystalgurl101-***Yup, it was Maxwell. And I'm glad you thought the latest chapter wasâ€|seductive. Oh god, whenever I think of the actual show and my fic, I can't help but laugh since they're actually so different. Thanks for reviewing!

****Hamijou4ever-***I'm glad you liked the last chapter. Don't worry: there will be plenty of love between Hamtaro and Bijou soon enough. Or will thereâ€|?

****Lawliet's Angel-***You saw that chapter eight scene between Hamtaro and Bijou coming? Really? Because I didn't :) I'm glad you liked it, and thanks for reviewing!

****Macarov-***Thanks for the story's compliment! Honestly, I prefer it if the hams are human or Ham-Human I guess since I feel they're so much easier to write. That, and "Petals" wouldn't have the same feel if they were still hamsters. Thanks for the review!

****Shadow Bijou-***Yeah, technically fanfiction doesn't allow personally thanking reviewers. I could actually get the story deleted because of that, but I feel it's necessary since I love all the comments you leave (and I just recently discovered the 'reply' feature for reviews like two days ago). I don't want to reference to the moment Hamtaro and Bijou had last chapter since they decided not to bring it up again, but as you saw, this chapter had a little bit about Bijou reminiscing about it, though this chapter's main purpose was to reveal Roger's feelings. Thanks for the review!

****Steven-***I'm glad you liked it! Thanks for reviewing!

****Wishbone the Lover of Books-***Yup, that scene last chapter was never planned, which annoys me since I don't like deviating and I have a plan in my mind for every chapter. But yeahâ€|that guy last chapter wasn't Hamtaro; it was indeed Maxwell. Thanks for the review!

As always, reviews are always appreciated!

-CN

10. My Girlfriend Went to Glasgow

****CN****

****Petals****

****Chapter Ten: *_My Girlfriend Went to Glasgow_***

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The next morning, Bijou Ribon woke up to an overbearing alarm clock. Feeling uncommonly groggy for waking up at such an unfavorable hour, she hesitantly got out of bed and dragged herself to the bathroom, sleep evident in every uncoordinated step she took.

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Hamtaro Haruna woke up without much difficulty. Ok, so he was probably running a little late, but on the bright side he had gotten enough rest and was more than excited. He stared at the clock on his nightstand.

5:00

Ok! So he had an hour to take a shower, get dressed, eat breakfast, finish packing, drive to the airport and get onto the flight. He could do that, right?

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Bijou had to admit she was much livelier after taking that shower. She then proceeded to get dressed, brush her hair, put on some make-up and make her way to her kitchen.

She couldn't help but smile as she saw a note pinned on the fridge with her name on it:

Like we said last night, Sandy and I are gonna miss you to pieces! We would personally see you off and wish you luck at your little business thingy, but we decided that we were not waking up while it is still dark outside. Not even for you. Of course that doesn't make us love you any less, Bij! Just try to enjoy the hotel food and try not to be bored to death at this convention!

_Have fun, my dear! _

_Pashmina and Sandy
>(but mostly Pashmina since I'm the one who's writing)

_P.S. Please make your best attempt at not going utterly insane due to spending the next few days with Hamtaro Haruna, ok? _

Bijou smiled as she took the note off the fridge and held it in her hands. After placing it inside her purse, she got herself a bowl of cereal and checked outside for her newspaper. Sure enough, the paper had arrived and as she comfortably ate her breakfast she scanned through the French news.

Somewhere during the Fine Livings section, she glanced at the clock.

4:22

Content with her timing, Bijou continued with her meal.

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Breakfast is overrated anyway, Hamtaro thought as he closed the fridge. He really wished he stocked up on more "quick" food since he could have a fast, easy breakfast on the go. But he had more important things to do. Hopefully he could grab something at the airport.

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The trip was only supposed to be for two days, so all Bijou needed was a small suitcase that she rolled with ease out of her room.

As she placed it into the trunk of her little blue car, she felt a sense of pride well inside her. Her mother had so often dictated their schedules when it came to business trips. It was nice to feel so independent for once.

Her car's clock read _4:41_.

A pleased expression gracing her features, she started the car and backed out of her driveway.

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Hamtaro nearly broke a sweat as he tried to zip up his bag. Trying once more, he unzipped his luggage and tried to reorganize (which wasn't really a fair choice of words since his clothes weren't organized in the first place) the haphazard array of clothes that faced him.

Finally getting the bag closed, he threw it over his shoulders and nearly tripped over the sofa as he ran out of the apartment.

He glanced at his watch as he waited for the elevator to come up.

5:29

Eyes bulging, he decided it would be more efficient to just take the stairs.

-

As she arrived at her designated gate, Bijou was pleased to see the monitors display that her flight to Kyoto was right on schedule.

Though, she couldn't help but wonder where Haruna had gotten off to. Passport and ticket safe in her hands, she sat down in one of the rows and glanced at the clock.

5:19

She sighed and leaned back into the chair. Haruna had time to show up, so for now she was just going to relax and remember to focus on

the goals of the convention.

-

Hamtaro felt like banging his head over and over again against his steering wheel. This was the _worst_ possible time to have such traffic. And he was using the express lane, too!

He dared not look at the clock. He knew he was already incredibly behind schedule as it was. This was not the time to get himself more stressed out.

Thinking of stressed out people—he hoped Ribon wasn't losing her head at the moment.

-

It had been ten minutes since she arrived at the gate, and, truth be told, she was starting to feel just a bit antsy.

With her vast experience of flying, she knew the PA would announce her group's boarding soon.

But she wasn't going to get stressed out just yet. Keeping herself firmly planted in her seat, she decided not to get worked up about it. Though she did start biting her lip, fingers tapping nervously against the armrests.

-

Oh screw it! Hamtaro didn't have time to go looking for his gate. Checking in with security had been painfully long enough. Instead, he set out to scan any abnormally-white-haired girl in the crowd as he loudly shouted, "RIBON!! _RIBON_!!" through the main lobby.

-

Bijou felt her heartbeat quicken as she turned around, yet again, to search for her co-worker.

Not seeing him, she turned back and started to pace before her row of seats. She couldn't possibly get onto the plane without him, right? Well, she had to remind herself, it wasn't like Haruna would be an asset to this business trip anyway.

But still—he had an obligation to be here so how could he just not show up?

Last call for Japanese Airlines Flight 453! Now boarding Flight 453 for Japanese Airlines!

Realizing that Haruna had just thrown away the entire trip, Bijou felt a wave of emotions come out of her in the form of tears. She placed her head in her hand and cried.

Meanwhile, onlookers passed the upset girl and whispered to each other.

"Oh, poor thing! Her lover must not have come!"

"Yeahâ€|she looks so sad. She should probably sit down."

"To be stood up like that! The boy should feel horrible, I mean come on! She's a _wreck_."

"Shh! What if she hears us? Just keep moving."

Bijou felt herself choke out a cry as she realized how pitiful she must've looked. (But perhaps what was more pitiful were the accusations the strangers made about her relationship with Haruna.)

Just thinking about him made Bijou's blood boil. How could he do something so stupid? That idiot! That inconsiderate maniac. That complete moron! That-

"RIBON!"

All tears instantly vanished from her face as she turned around with an incredible speed she did not know she possessed.

"Youâ€|_Ohâ€|I'm gonna kill you_," Bijou said to him as she walked over, rage seething from her very being.

Hamtaro turned around to locate the source of the voice and his eyes widened appreciatively as he found the one he had been looking for.

"Ribon," he chimed happily as he eliminated the distance between them. He noted very cautiously that she seemed to be a little ticked.

"Don't you 'Ribon' me! We have to get to the check-in point _now_," she hissed as she turned on her heel and darted toward their next destination.

Following her, thought with slight difficulty due to her speed, Hamtaro couldn't help but call out, "You could've gotten on the que without me."

As they got to the end of an incredibly long line (like really, really, really long), Bijou forced back a cry from the back of her throat.

"And what would've happened then? _Hmmm_? What if you never showed up you mean, rude, pompous creep?!" she exclaimed as she jabbed a finger into his chest with every malicious word she spoke, emerald eyes sparkling with hatred.

"Calm down, Ribon; people will start to stare," Hamtaro reminded as he nervously looked around him.

Bijou felt a bitter laugh escape her lips.

"Oh, people _did_ stare. They felt sorry for the girl whose _lover_ left her standing there. They thought of me as some helpless, broken thing! So you have _no_ right to be telling me not to get all riled up especially since _you're_ the cause of all of this!!" she gestured vehemently at the ridiculously long line before her.

Hamtaro crossed his hands over his chest as he looked to the side like a child caught red-handed.

"It's not entirely my fault!"

"YES IT IS!! If YOU had just gotten here ON TIME you IDIOT we wouldn't be stuck in the BACK OF THE LINE!!"

Bijou was now fuming and everyone in the gate knew it. Her face was scarlet with anger and her hands were now at her sides, clenched fists ready to attack at a moment's notice.

"Ok, fine. It is, and I'm sorry! But you don't need to get the airport staring at us!" the boy reminded through a forced smile to show the rest of the people around there was nothing wrong.

"It's a little too late for that," the French girl retorted viciously, ruining the façade Hamtaro was trying to build.

"Excuse me, Miss, Sir, but is everything alright?" an attendant approached the pair tentatively, looking a bit embarrassed to break up what was obviously between the two.

"It's fine, thank you," Hamtaro quipped before Bijou could say anything.

"Are you sure, sir?" the man asked as his eyes settled on Bijou. "Because you're causing a scene."

"Forgive me, _sir_, but YOU'D also be making a _SCENE_ if your good for NOTHING PIECE OF CRAP CO-"

Hamtaro quickly covered Bijou's mouth with his hand. She was going to say "piece of crap co-worker", but that would surely go against his plan.

"Honey, settle down. You have to excuse us, sir. She's pregnant and going through incredible mood swings. Hormones, you know?" Hamtaro first addressed the struggling Bijou, then the attendant.

"Oh, you're pregnant? How lovely," the attendant said, smiling at Bijou. Bijou tried to shake her head vehemently but Hamtaro held it still.

"Yes, she's about!" Hamtaro now had to think of a reasonable amount of time, "four months along now."

Cats Bijou thanked her lucky stars and all the heavens above that her top was designed to flow _away_ from her body.

The attendant's mouth formed an 'O' but he immediately donned a smile.

"Oh I completely understand, sir. My wife is at her worst during her third and fourth months," the attendant explained. "In fact, if you'll come with me I'll check you in right now."

Hamtaro had to keep himself from grinning maniacally. What an ingenious stroke of luck!

"Thank you, sir! I'm sure myâ€¦" Again, Hamtaro had to pause, noticing no ring on Bijou's finger, "girlfriend would agree that that's would be a very nice. Actually, it's extra special for us since we're eloping!" Hamtaro cried, getting more and more engrossed in his own little story as he followed the attendant, Bijou's wrist tightly in his hands.

"How sweet," the attendant said as he moved around an unattended check-in desk. "I've always wondered what it'd be like if my wife and I eloped. We always thought that it would've been more romantic, don't you agree?"

"Yes," Hamtaro supplied, but his voice was different. He sounded like he was contemplating something seriously. He turned to look at the girl whose wrist was still warm in his hands. Her emerald eyes indicated that she was too livid at the man to care why he was looking at her, though she did pick up on the change in his voice.

As the attendant finished with them, Hamtaro thanked the man at least ten times over before they scurried on their merry little ways.

They had both checked in their suitcases at security, and thus Bijou had only a purse on her and Hamtaro a large bag as they continued to make their way towards the plane.

"What a cute couple," the attendant sighed, watching them leave.

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"That was possibly the most stupid thing you've ever done, but I have to admit it took some fast thinking," Bijou quickly panted as they turned right.

"Well I work best under pressure," Hamtaro said smugly. He quickly checked his watch. Three minutes.

"Up there, hurry!" Bijou chided as Hamtaro's grip on her tightened and they raced to the door guarded by an airport official.

"You two nearly missed it," the official at the door said, holding out his hands for their tickets.

"Can you believe he's my fiancÃ©?" Bijou muttered under her breath, letting out a sigh of relief.

"Really? You two make an adorable couple," the guard responded, handing back their documents.

"Thank you," Hamtaro said, sounding all too much like they complimented something that actually _existed_.

"Well enjoy your flight!" the guard said as Hamtaro and Bijou made their ways into the door.

"Thank you," Bijou called back before being led by her "fiancÃ©" deeper into the tube.

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The two botanists quickly found their seats and settled down. Bijou sat by the window and looked up at Hamtaro as he put his bag into the overhead compartment. A particular keychain caught her eye.

"'My Girlfriend Went to Glasgow and All She Got Me Was This Keychain,'" Bijou read, her face looking suddenly surprised. "Who got you that?" she asked as Hamtaro sat down beside her.

"Sparkle," he explained as he leaned back into his seat, eyes closed, relaxing for the first time the entire morning. "She's still on her international tour, remember? She sent me this a few months ago."

Bijou looked out the window. "Why would she send you something that said _that_?" she inquired, feigning nonchalance.

"I don't know. She thought it was cute or someâ€|" One of Hamtaro's eyes looked over at her.

"You're jealous of her, aren't you?" he asked, causing her to look over at him, eyes widened.

"What the hell gave you _that_ idea?" she replied. Hamtaro re-closed his one open eye and smiled.

"You always had a rivalry going with her. And now you're jealous that she cared enough about me to send me something."

"Bring your ego down, Haruna," the girl retorted.

"You know," Hamtaro started to say as he straightened up, a serious look in his cobalt eyes.

Bijou looked back at him, acknowledging him.

"I never said sorry for making you cry back there," he said quietly, suddenly looking down.

"I wasn'tâ€|" Bijou decided there was no purpose to this. "Thank you. Apology accepted."

For a brief moment, Hamtaro looked up at her and she was smiling.

However, it was time for the plane to take off, and the two of them quickly settled back into their seats with Hamtaro resting his eyes and Bijou looking at the blue skies around them.

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Ok then, there goes chapter ten!

You see I wasn't going to type chapter ten, but tonight, there's a huge football game at my university and classes were cancelled. So I spent the last two hours typing this.

You know I always thank my reviewers, but I figured I would start using the Review Reply feature since FanFiction banned actually replying individually.

So the plot thickensâ€¦sort ofâ€¦.I hope you guys liked this chapter! I missed a football game (more like I gave my ticket to my roommate) for this!

So please review! It'd mean so much!

-CN

11. If You Give a Ham Human a Marker

Hmmâ€¦there was a lack of reviews last chapter (well, less than usual)â€¦Oh wellâ€¦hopefully, this chapter will be a little more appreciated.

****CN****

****Petals****

****Chapter Eleven: **_If You Give a Ham-Human a Marker_**

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The plane ride was excruciatingly boring. Try as he might and despite his frantic morning, Hamtaro found he couldn't fall asleep. Nor was he able to satisfy himself with simply looking around and enjoying his surroundings: there was no one and nothing particularly interesting on this flight: there were a bunch of high-school students excitedly talking about some debate tournament across the aisle, a woman rapidly punching into her Smartphone behind him and an old man whose sleeping caused snoring that was disturbingly loud, even on an airplane, in front of him.

Trying to appease his insatiable mood, Hamtaro turned to his left to face his flying companion, who was, at the moment, happily lost in her own little slumberland.

She had dozed off a few minutes ago, curling her legs up to her chest and pressing her face against the pillow-y back of her seat. She looked ridiculously blissful, and Hamtaro decided to take this moment to observe her as he knew this would be one of his rare chances.

Her face looked so much more at peace while she rested, an unbelievably small smile gracing the corners of her lips. Her bangs had been let out of her usual half ponytail, allowing a new layer of white locks to frame her face in a veryâ€|for lack of better wordâ€|_serene_ manner.

There was something almost childlike about her in this state. Hamtaro was so much more used to seeing a sarcastic expression upon her features or perhaps an angry glareâ€|

Hamtaro felt a strange discomfort settle within him as he realized those negative expressions were reserved only for him. Indeed, as he looked back through his memories of her, he realized that the gentle-faced girl he saw now was the girl that Stan, Pashmina, Sandy, Oxnard, Dexter, Howdy, Maxwell, Boss, Panda, Snoozer, Penelope and Cappy knew.

But not _him_. The girl _he_ knew as Bijou Ribon was angry and annoyed and rarely let this mask falter. He dwelled on this thought longer than he thought he would have.

His eyes softened as he heard her let out a small soundâ€"a cross between a 'mew' and the beginning of a yawnâ€"in her sleep. He brought a hand under his chin and rested it on the armrest between the two Ham-Humans.

At the moment, she didn't have any kind of harsh or negative features on her face. She looked truly happy, and Hamtaro decided he was going to soak it in while he could, meaning while he didn't have to worry about Boss, Stan, Oxnard or anyone else walking in on him and never letting him forget doing something so _sappy_.

Her skin looked ridiculously soft. Hamtaro accounted it to the lighting in the aircraft, but her usually-pale complexion seemed creamy and pink and so lush all at the same time.

He leaned forward, bringing his face so close to hers that he could smell her enticing scent and hear her delicate breathing.

The color in her cheeks were just calling out for his touchâ€|He just _had_ to see if they felt as good as they looked. (This was the part that he was eternally grateful no one could witness.)

He brought up one of his handsâ€"slightly trembling for no known reasonâ€"and thought he would get the answer he was looking for, however, Bijou had chosen that very moment to move.

His fingers were just millimeters away from her face when the girl yawned, still very much asleep, and blissfully turned to her side.

Hamtaro's eyes were frozen, afraid of getting caught, as they watched the French girl turn over, the light of the sun outside now adding an angelic sort of depth to her face. However, once he realized that she was too asleep to have noticed anything, he sighed.

He smiled sadly at his momentary stupidity as he continued to watch the girl enjoy her rest. This was probably just the sign he had beenâ€|

“wait”

Hamtaro felt something jab against his chest. He looked down and realized that the pain had been there this entire time.

Confused, Hamtaro opened up his garment and was surprised to find a large, black marker in its inner pocket.

He didn't remember exactly how it got there (though he remembered furiously writing his name on one of his luggage tags earlier that morning), but as he looked at the hand of the European girl resting on the armrest so dangerously close to him, he couldn't complain“

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Bijou's eyes crinkled before they fluttered open. The sun was so strong, she sat up straight, attempting to rub the stinging out of her eyes.

She was surprised she could get to sleep at all. Her mother always requested First Class in order to attain the highest level of comfort possible. She was so used to those, though she couldn't complain since she felt she got a good rest.

"We“haven't landed yet?" she asked to no one in particular as she stretched her back and observed her surroundings.

"“No“but we should be“getting there“soon“"

Bijou turned to her right and saw her co-worker forcing himself to suppress his laughter.

Her voice was still soft with sleepiness as she spoke, "What's with you?"

Hamtaro put a hand over his mouth as he tried to do a nonchalant shrug.

"Nothing.."

She resisted the urge to scowl as she glanced at Hamtaro.

"Well you're acting pretty suspicious for 'nothing'," she reminded.

Beneath his hand, Hamtaro let out a laugh but quickly covered it up as he cleared his throat.

"Oh?...How so?..." he asked as his body shook with laughter.

Bijou crossed her hands over her chest. "Ok now I know something's up. What happened?"

Again, Hamtaro evaded the answer to the question. He did, however, make one fatal mistake in glancing at Bijou's arm and then immediately looking away“

Bijou looked startled for a second before she decided to see what was so interesting about her arm anyway. Thinking she would find nothing new, her lovely emerald eyes nearly shot out of her head as she sawâ€|

"What is _this_?!" she cried, pointing to the designs tracing from her hand all the way up to her shoulder.

There were little black bands drawn around her fingers as rings, but that was just the tip of the iceberg. There seemed to be some sort of snake 'tattoo' slithering its way up the entire length of her arm. Not to mention there were sad faces drawn on every one of the pads of her fingers. Plus, it was hard to ignore the 'EWW' written in a heart on the very top of her arm just beneath her shoulder.

At a loss for words, Bijou just glanced from her arm to her co-worker and then back again.

"â€|!"

"Oh come on," Hamtaro added as he let out another laugh (_Cats_Ribon's face was priceless), "it's not that bad."

Once again, Bijou couldn't say anything as she stared at her arm, though her mouth did fall open in complete shock at having slept through _Picasso's_ latest work.

Boredom long gone, Hamtaro was enjoying himself. That is, until. Bijou's outstretched arms formed a fist.

Hamtaro's eyes widened and as she lifted her fist Hamtaro prepared himself for her hitting, however, the blow never came.

Tentatively, Hamtaro opened his eyes to see Bijou's outstretched hand.

"Give me."

"â€|umm.." Hamtaro was either honestly confused or was going to play dumb as long as he could.

"The marker. I want the marker you used to defile me like this," Bijou explained, hand still outstretched.

"What for?" Hamtaro asked, his voice cautious as if walking on egg shells.

"Isn't it _obvious_ Haruna? You did this to me, and now I get to thank you for it."

The look in her eyes could kill, and though currently fearing his life, Hamtaro regretted, once again, putting that sort of look upon her.

"Before you overreact, Ribon," He said carefully as he held out his hands in defense, "just remember that I didn't draw on anything else beside your arm with the marker-"

"-Is it permanent?" Bijou asked quickly as if just remembering the thought. Her eyes shook very slightly as she stared at the man before

her, her lips barely parted.

"I don't think so but I doubt it is," Hamtaro said as he pulled the writing utensil out of his jacket pocket. "I'm pretty sure it's not permanent since why would I beâ€¦carrying
â€¦aroundâ€¦a..heheâ€¦_oh_â€¦"

Bijou immediately pulled the marker out of his hands as she glanced across the label. Sure enough, the words 'Permanent Marker' were written across the surface in almost as bold letters as the markings on her arm.

Bijou's eyes lowered for a second before she immediately uncapped the marker, eerily resembling a warrior unsheathing their swords.

"Close your eyes."

It was an order.

Bijou waited; Hamtaro kept his eyes wide open.

"Close them," she repeated.

"Not until you tell me what you're gonna do," Hamtaro supplied quickly.

"I'm only going to repay the favor," Bijou assured. "It's the least you can let me do."

"But why do I have to close my eyes?" Hamtaro's frightened voice almost sounded like he was whining.

"Because I wasn't awake when you went on your little art spree with me," she reminded.

"â€¦Fine. But! Remember I only scribbled on your arm, and that was only one of them, too, so don't do anything too drastic," he pleaded as he reluctantly closed his eyes, understanding that as every millisecond passes, he was making a mistake.

"I'll define what's 'drastic'," Bijou said in a low voice as she tainted his skin.

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"I told you not to anything too drastic!" Hamtaro reminded as he pressed his face up to the bathroom mirror.

"Did I do anything too drastic?" Bijou asked in a saccharine voice, unable to hide her smile as she poured some nail polish remover onto a cotton ball.

All Hamtaro did was glare in her direction. The fact that he had a monocle drawn in a very cartoonish manner on his left eye, a curly, highly villain-esque mustache (complete with matching goatee) along with very squiggly sideburns drawn over his face made it incredibly difficult to take him seriously.

He learned the hard way what happened if you give a Ham-Human a marker.

Bijou let out a laugh as she closed the nail polish remover's bottle.

"Well I hope you're satisfied. That little girl we passed on the way here looked like she was about to cry when she saw my face," Hamtaro scolded as he crossed his hands over his chest.

"Silly Haruna, she would've done that even without the marker drawings on your face," Bijou explained, eyes closed and showing Hamtaro a positively sunny smile.

"Now hold still."

Hamtaro moved back, which led him to be cornered in this miniscule bathroom, much to his disliking.

"Are you sure this is gonna work?" he asked as he eyed the cotton ball suspiciously.

Bijou stepped closer to the man. "This is the only thing I have in my bag that's safe enough to put on skin and remove this gunk. Now hold still!"

Hamtaro felt the need to oblige as Bijou eliminated the distance between the two and stepped up to reach the monocle over his eyes. He was now eye-to-eye with the girl as she wiped away the markings.

The distance was making Hamtaro much more nervous than was normal. Her wonderfully delicate fingers brushed against his face. He felt himself release a breath he did not realize he was holding as he let out an anxiousâ€"yet oddly enough, pleasedâ€"sigh.

Bijou gasped as she stepped back. "It doesn't burn, does it?"

Her eyes were shaking with fear as she watched the man. "I-I..the bottle says it's non-toxic, so I had no idea! I used it plenty of times to take off nail polish so I thought putting it on skin was fine-"

"It doesn't burn," Hamtaro explained, slightly confused.

"Then why'd you make that weird noise?" Bijou asked, tilting her head to the side.

"It wasn't a 'weird noise'," he supplied quickly. "It was a yawn, a suppressed one. I got up pretty early, you know."

Bijou stared at him a second longer before looking back to the top of his face.

"It's not working," she said, slightly frantic. She once again stepped closer to the man and brought her thumb up to his eyes. She rubbed the remnants of the remover deeper into his skin and bit her lip.

"I don't understandâ€"this should work." She moved away.

"Ummâ€|" Hamtaro tried not to panic as he hastily pulled the marker out of his pocket.

"It doesn't say what we should try to get it off," Hamtaro said as he read the label. "Hold on, maybe it says under this sticker."

Hamtaro scratched the sticker off the label and stopped.

"What?" Bijou asked as she peered over the Ham-Human's shoulder. "_Cats_, we can't get it off, can we? Don't tell me I'm stuck with a snake on my arm for the rest of my life!"

"â€|Noâ€|" Hamtaro said as he continued staring at the marker.

"Then whaâ€|" Bijou stopped as well as she read what was under the sticker.

Conveniently, the word NON- was completely covered by the price tag.

"Hey, see, it actually _wasn't_ permanent. The label actually said 'NON-permanent marker'. That's good news, right Ribon?" Hamtaro asked as he looked over at the girl.

He was meted by the sight of a Bijou so angry that he swore any instant steam would start blowing out of her ears.

Without another word, she stepped forward, turned on the sink, poured some liquid soap onto her hands and started scrubbing her arms.

Hamtaro cautiously stepped beside her and splashed some water onto his face, instantly smudging the marker residue.

They stayed like this for a moment as both Ham-Humans got their skin to be as clean and drawing-free as it was when they boarded the plane. However, despite this little cleansing, Hamtaro could feel the tension that was higher than usual between the two of them.

As Bijou wiped her hands with a paper towel, she let out a sort of defeated, tired sigh.

"I don't know when you'll grow up, Haruna," she said as she discarded the paper towel into the trash.

She pushed the man aside as she went for the door. However, Hamtaro's voice stopped her.

"When _I'll_ grow up? You drew all over my face!" He reminded indignantly.

"I only did that because you drew on me first," Bijou explained as she turned on her heel, facing the Ham-Human. "Every time we reach new grounds you do something stupid to set us back to square one!" she cried.

In her mind popped up the memories of being asked out as a joke in front of the cafeteria, grabbing her shoulders while in the office and stealing a kiss from her, making her worry as she heard the Flight PA call for their flight to board, and now this.

These same memories came into Hamtaro's mind, too, and perhaps that's why he didn't say anything. Rather, he lowered his head, almost as if accepting some sort of punishment.

Bijou sighed, hoping that he had now accepted that he had a little more maturing to do. She looked as if she were about to turn around and leave, however, she didn't get the chance.

"_Ladies and gentlemen, the captain apologizes in advance for the turbulence we will be facing shortly_."

Bijou looked up and asked herself, "Turbulence?" She certainly didn't feel anything. That changed within the next two seconds.

The plane felt like something had knocked the underside of it upwards, causing the passengers in their seats to practically bounce and making Bijou fall face forward into Hamtaro.

The plane continued ricocheting like this, and Bijou heard herself let out a few small cries of distress. Instantly, though, she felt two arms encircle her and hold her tightly in place.

Her face was crimson and it was practically glued to his chest, and with his grip around her, it made it impossible to move. However, as she forced her face to look up at his, she saw a strange determination etched into his cobalt eyes. Almost immediately, she understood his message as her eyes widened.

He wasn't going to let her go.

They stayed like this while the plane continued its erratic path, neither of them saying a word. They didn't even realize when the plane stopped. It took a flight attendant opening the door to the bathroom to bring these two back to earth.

"I knew it. As soon as I saw you two go in hereâ€|" she said as she placed her hands on her hips.

Bijou immediately pushed herself off of the man, not realizing the upset look that flashed in his eyes for half a second.

"It's nothing like what you think," Hamtaro explained quickly. "We had marker all over our bodies and had to-"

The flight attendant held up her hands. "I don't want to hear it, please. I've heard every excuse in the book." She ushered for the two Ham-Humans to come out of the bathroom.

"But surely you must have seen my arm and his faceâ€|" Bijou trailed off as she felt the attendant push her back.

"Like I said, I don't want to hear it. This is a public bathroom on an airplane and not meant for _whatever_ it is you two were up to. Do you honestly think you two are the first to pull this kind of shenanigan in front of me?"

"But-" they both started to say.

"Get back to your seats, please, before I call Airplane

Personnel."

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Once back at their seats, Bijou sighed and pulled a magazine out of her bag. Hamtaro looked over and realized it was a French business magazine.

Suddenly, a thought hit him. A thought that did not keep well with him at all.

"Ribon," he said as he stared at her thoroughly.

"Mmhmm?" she asked without even looking up as her eyes took in the words of the article.

Hamtaro paused, choosing his words carefully as he spoke.

"When you take over your company, what I mean is that it's based in France, right? So I was just wondering if you'd are you gonna run Ribon Jewelers from France?" he asked quickly, trying to get the question out as quickly as possible.

Bijou looked at the man and returned his stare. After what felt like an eternity to Hamtaro (more like two seconds in 'real' time), Bijou smiled.

"I have no plans of leaving Japan," she said matter-of-factly. As she returned to her magazine, she sighed again.

"But I'm sure if I did, you'd find another poor soul to torment in your spare time."

Hamtaro feigned a smile.

"Right. Of course."

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As the same flight attendant who caught them in the bathroom cried, "We hope you enjoyed your flight, and welcome to Kyoto!", Hamtaro and Bijou gave her the most icy glares they could come up with before leaving the plane.

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"We have to find the chauffeur the botanical gardens hired for us," Bijou reminded as she wheeled the luggage behind her and into the lobby. "Do you see anyone with a sign that has our names on it?"

"No," Hamtaro said as he stared through the doors of the entrance at all the taxis just waiting for passengers. "This is all too over-rated. We could've just gotten a taxi."

"Wait!" Bijou said as she trailed off, squinting her eyes and standing on her tiptoes. "What's that?"

Hamtaro turned around and looked in the same direction Bijou was looking. In the crowd of people holding up signs, he saw one rectangular piece of cardboard sticking out and shoving its way to the front.

Bijou smiled as she saw what was written on the sign.

"Hamraro and Bijou."

"Come on, _Hamraro_," Bijou beckoned playfully over her shoulder. "I believe that's for us."

Through the crowd stepped a young girl, no older than Hamtaro and Bijou, dressed in a black driver's uniform. She had light brown hair and sparkling blue eyes and wore a large smile on her face as she came to the front of the crowd.

"I believe you're looking for us," Bijou said to the girl as she came in front of the girl. "We're here for the Botanical Gardens Convention."

The girl's smile grew wider. She brought down her sign and looked at the names.

"So I'm guessing you're Bijou, and you're," she nodded over to Hamtaro who was standing right behind Bijou. "Hamraro."

"Oh, well, that's actually a mistake," Bijou said as she and the chauffeur stepped aside to let the other chauffeurs and guides pick up their clients. "His name's not Hamraro."

"Really? That makes me feel a lot better," the girl said as she took the luggage from Bijou's hand and starting dragging it towards the airport exit.

"Why?" Hamtaro asked suspiciously as he and Bijou followed the girl.

"Well I'm just so relieved that you're name really isn't something lame like Hamraro or Hamtaro or whatever. I can't take those names seriously, and if I can't take your name seriously, I don't take you seriously," she explained as she walked the two Ham-Humans to a non-stretch limo located in the nearest parking spot.

Bijou looked back and noticed Hamtaro looked pretty annoyed. So to stop a volcano from erupting, she decided to cut in.

"Oh, he's used to not being taken seriously," Bijou joked, a smiling gracing her face. "That's probably because his name's Hamtaro."

The girl stopped just as she was putting Bijou's luggage into the trunk. Her blue eyes widened and she practically dropped the suitcase into the car as she brought a hand to her mouth.

"Oh I'm _so_ sorry! If it's any consolation, my name isn't any better, you know? I'm Flora!" "oops, that reminds me." The girl

straightened herself up and readjusted the shiny chauffeur's hat resting on her light brown locks.

"I'm Flora and I'll be your chauffeur for the next couple of days! Well, I'm not a full-time chauffeur, you know? I'm actually studying to become a nurse and this job pays the tuition fees," she cried happily.

"I'm Bijou, and this is my co-worker Hamtaro," Bijou introduced. "But you probably know that."

A blush crept upon Flora's cheeks as she rubbed her neck nervously.

"Well, just feel good about the fact that for the next two days, I'll be serving you. So hopefully that will erase any hard feelings?" she asked cautiously as she looked up at Hamtaro.

With one approving look from Bijou, Hamtaro nodded his head. Flora clapped her hands and took Hamtaro's luggage from him, dropping it into the trunk.

"First things first: You need to get checked-in at the hotel!"

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Hamtaro let out a frustrated sigh as he looked over their packed schedule for the next two days.

"We're hardly ever gonna have time to be in our room," he moaned as he realized what little free time they were going to receive.

"Well what do you expect? This isn't a field trip or a vacation," Bijou reminded as she leaned over the hotel desk, waiting for the receptionist.

"What rooms are we again?"

Bijou glanced at the information packet Roger had given them before they left work yesterday.

"210 and 257," she explained. "I hope we get checked-in soon. We have our first meeting in a few hours."

"I'm sure that'll be enough time," Hamtaro said. "I wonder what our rooms will look like."

"Well this is a four-star hotel, so they should be alright," Bijou replied. She was getting a little irritated, though. Why was there nobody here to check them in?

Just as she was about to call out for some help, a receptionist a few years older than the two Ham-Humans came from a room behind the desk.

She had an unbelievably large smile plastered on her face as she asked, "How may I help you?"

Bijou showed the receptionist the piece of paper which assigned them their rooms. "We're here for the Botanical Garden Convention."

"Rooms 210 and 257," the receptionist repeated to herself as she started typing on her computer in lightning speed.

"Correct," Bijou said as she looked around the hotel lobby. It was actually very ornate with beautiful gold, Corinthian columns and painted tile floors. Too bad their service seemed to stink.

"Hmmmâ€|" the receptionist looked up at Hamtaro and Bijou with a twisted expression on her face.

"Is everything alright?" Hamtaro asked the woman as he came up to the desk. This question immediately made Bijou glance back at the receptionist.

"Wellâ€|" the receptionist glanced back at her screen one more time before she gave another bad expression to Hamtaro and Bijou.

"There's not a problem, is there?" Hamtaro asked as he leaned before the receptionist, using the sweetest most cajoling voice he could come up with. Bijou wanted to roll her eyes but felt the current situation was a little too demanding than to stress over Hamtaro.

The receptionist tapped her chin with a finger.

"We same to have already booked those rooms and the guests seemed to have checked in yesterday." She shook her head. "It must have been one of the new girlsâ€|"they _always_ make mistakes like these."

"But there are a couple of free rooms, right?" Bijou asked nervously.

The receptionist smiled nervously and let out a nervous laugh.

"Well, at the moment, we're really busy with the convention and all, you know? And the weather in Kyoto is so lovely this time of year that we have a lot of businessâ€|"

"So we're going to have to find another hotel?" Hamtaro asked.

"Not quite!" the girl cried as her large smile returned. "We have a room big enough for you two available."

"Which room is that?" Bijou asked a little tiredly, just wanting to get upstairs and prepare for their upcoming meeting.

The receptionist smiled nervously once again.

"The honeymoon suite."

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Before anyone asks, Flora is not an OC. She is "Nurse-Ham" if any of you saw that Hamtaro special.

I hope you all enjoyed this chapter...looking back and thinking of chapters to come, this one is one of my favorites.

Is Hamtaro finally going to accept these feelings? Does Bijou return them at all? We'll just have to wait and see!

Please read and review! I love the feedback!

-CN

12. This is a Sign

Guysâ€¦I'm going to be honest: This lack of reviews is a little off-setting. I work so hard on these chapters and apparently get more than 400 hits per chapter with but a handful of reviewsâ€¦It's a little disappointing.

But nevertheless, the story must continue. So here's chapter twelve.

CN

Petals

Chapter Twelve: _This is a Sign_

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"This is a sign," Bijou cried, lost in somewhat of a trance state, as she followed Hamtaro down the red-carpeted hallway, luggage wheeling behind her.

Hamtaro rolled his eyes, grateful that Bijou couldn't see his irritated expression. She _was not_ going to let this go.

More to herself than anyone else, Bijou continued.

"It really is a sign. My mother always told me I belonged in business. Science is just not what Ribons do. I told her that I knew what I was doing, and that _this_ was the field I loved. And I

thought that surely I could handle one little business trip. I'd been on so many beforeâ€¦|But _no_â€¦|My coworker was late, I had to wash marker off my arm, the flight attendant thought I was doing some_thing_ with the moron who got the marker all over meâ€¦"who just happened to be my ridiculously late coworkerâ€¦"and my room was double-booked. And the best part is: The business convention hasn't even started yet! I can only imagine what lies ahead for me after seeing the super day I had."

She made a dismissing gesture with her right hand as she looked to the side.

"Truly, it's a sign."

"You're gonna give yourself a hemorrhage if you keep thinking like that," Hamtaro reminded as he rolled his luggage behind him.

"That would just be icing on the cake," Bijou replied sarcastically. "And you shouldn't be talking, Haruna, since you've caused most of the trouble today."

Hamtaro simply rolled his eyes, yet again, in return and continued making his way down the hall.

"And exactly _how_ long is this dumb hallway?" The French girl snapped as she looked around at the blood red velvet at her feet and the beautifully carved, golden picture frames adorning classic European masterpieces. Too bad she was in too foul a mood to take in any of the beauty.

"The honeymoon suite's the only room on this floor," Hamtaro reminded, pointing to a set of double doors resting at the opposite end. Behind him he heard Bijou groan.

"Do not call it that," Bijou said acidly. "Especially when I told the receptionist that we weren't interested."

"Well she's giving us the room for free while beforehand we would've paid out of our paychecks," the boy explained. "That's why I told her we _were_ interested."

"I was so willing to give up my paycheck for thatâ€¦|" Bijou trailed off, mumbling about the fates trying to teach her a lesson.

"If it's free, who can complain? Besides, she said the room was big enough for the two of us, so maybe there are two beds," Hamtaro mused.

Bijou "hmmph"-ed in response (Hamtaro heard a distinctive "Whose ever heard of two beds in a honeymoon suite?" behind him) and stopped; the two of them had just arrived in front of the suite.

Hamtaro stepped onto the low, two-step staircase that led up to the double doors. He pulled out the key, the handle of which was molded into a beautiful silver heart, and paused before he inserted it.

"Hehâ€¦|isn't this cute?" he asked as he pointed to the heart-shaped lock.

Bijou simply crossed her hands over her chest and stuck her nose up in the air.

Hamtaro put the key into the lock and opened the door.

He gestured for Bijou to go in before him, and with a scowl plastered over her features, she picked up her suitcase and rolled it in. Before he could get in himself, he heard her gasp.

"Oh.My.God."

Hamtaro quickly followed her in, and as soon as he got a good look at the room, his mouth fell open.

It was painted in red jewel tones across the top half of the room with a white banister along the center and black on the bottom half. The furniture—including the gorgeous bed, large entertainment center, the lustrous desk and the cushy ottoman at the end of the bed—were made of a beautiful black wood (and the ottoman had a ridiculously comfy, black cushion resting atop it). A chandelier hanging down from the middle of the room was made out of molded wrought iron with brilliant crystals hanging off of it.

And the bed—ohhh the bed—

Resting on its black surface was a red comforter with white, Victorian-era fleur-de-lis designs on it. It had several massive red pillows resting against the headboard with elegant black throw pillows thrown across it. White rose petals were sprinkled all over the center of the bed.

"It's gorgeous," Bijou breathed, completely in awe. "Oh the bathroom!"

She rushed over to the door on the right side of the bed, discarding her luggage on the soft white carpet. Sure enough, the bathroom was just as lovely as she'd expected.

"It's so pretty!"

Hamtaro followed her in and mentally agreed. The shower, like most of the bathroom, was covered in red and black, but this time with tiles done in mosaic designs working their ways up the walls. Through the clear glass doors of the shower Bijou could see what looked like 15 or so jets, complete with a control system inside the shower, that were eagerly awaiting to bombard with wonderful sprays of pressured water.

The jacuzzi bathtub was already full with a giant layer of cloud-like bubbles with red rose petals across the top of the foam. Beside the tub, pre-lit red scented candles lined the wall with a pricy bottle of champagne resting in a large, silver bucket filled with ice.

Bijou turned around and Hamtaro felt a piece of him feel relieved to see a smile gracing her face.

"I guess it's not so bad," she said quietly as she moved out of the bathroom, a finger resting on her chin.

"As long as you'll stop whining," Hamtaro replied, stepping out from behind her and plopping onto the wonderfully comfortable bed.

Bijou looked at herself nervously in the mirror and bit her lip as she saw Hamtaro on the bed behind her.

"I'm sorry," she said, connecting with his eyes in his reflection. "I wouldn't shut up and made-"

"Don't worry about it," Hamtaro replied, cutting her off as he placed his head against the headboard. "It all worked out, didn't it?"

Bijou turned around and smiled. "I guessâ€¦" her brows suddenly furrowed.

"How come you get the bed?" she asked as she went over to the bed.

"Because," Hamtaro replied, turning to his side and thus turning his back to her.

"Well where am I supposed to sleep?" Bijou asked as she crawled onto the bed, sitting on her knees just behind his back.

Hamtaro shrugged. "I don't knowâ€¦tub?"

"What happened to being chivalrous?" the French girl asked indignantly.

Hamtaro turned around, a smug smile spread across his face. As he leaned on his elbows he said.

"Chivalry only works with a guy and a _girl_," he said pompously.

He really should've expected the shove in the chest he got from the white-haired girl. He nearly fell off the bed and had to grab the sheets desperately to hang on.

"You're right, Harunaâ€¦I see no guys here." Bijou closed her eyes and pushed herself against the headboard. She picked up a couple of the petals off the sheets and twiddled them between her fingers.

When Hamtaro composed himself, he stared at the girl sitting on the same bed as him.

"So you wanna sleep here?"

Bijou's eyes opened and she scanned the room for another possible place to rest. The ottoman was soft, but not nearly big enough for her to lay comfortable on it. The carpet was soft enough, so maybeâ€¦

"You can sleep on the bed if you want. I mean I don't take up that much room," Hamtaro said as he rubbed the back of his neck nervously.

Bijou's face reddened as she looked to the side.

"I think the ottoman's big enough, actuallyâ€|"

"Oh come on," Hamtaro suddenly sat up, suddenly wanting his case to appeal to her. "We can even put a border of pillows between us!"

"No, really, it's ok." Bijou clearly looked uncomfortable, and as soon as Hamtaro realized this, he looked down.

"You know what?" he started as Bijou glanced at him. "I'll sleep somewhere else."

The girl's eyes widened and she brought up her hands in front of her.

"No, you got here first, so it's all yours," she said frantically as she made an attempt to get off the bed. However, Hamtaro grabbed her hand before she could make another move. Startled, she looked down at his fingers wrapped around her wrist.

"Well if it's mine I'm offering it to you," he explained quietly, looking down at the bed.

"You don't have to do that," Bijou reminded as her tone softened.

"Think of it as an 'I'm sorry' for making you have such a bad day." He brought his eyes up to hers.

Bijou released herself from his grip and bit her lip.

"Harunaâ€|just don't come onto my side, ok?" Bijou warned as she lunged for several of the pillows that were lining the headboard. Hamtaro watched as she made a vertical line down the bed with the pillows.

He smiled to himself as he said, "Alright, Ribon."

Bijou got off the bed and examined her work, seeing if she divided the mattress equally. After a bit of readjusting, she smiled.

Suddenly, just as she was about to get her luggage to start unpacking, a thought hit her.

"What time is it?" she asked frantically as she ran over to her purse. Before Hamtaro could check his watch, she had her cell phone out and nearly smacked her forehead in frustration.

"The convention starts in two hours," Bijou thought out loud as she looked worriedly at her coworker.

Hamtaro got off the bed and yawned. "So? Plenty of time."

"Not with Kyoto traffic and this being rush hour," Bijou reminded. "Let's go."

"But I wanted to take a shower first," the man said tiredly. "That plane was really hot." He cringed, trying to shake off the grimy

feeling he got from being stuck on that plane all day.

Bijou rolled her eyes and pulled a bottle out of her purse. She walked over to Hamtaro, who looked completely perplexed as to what she was doing, and sprayed some of her body spray onto him.

It took a moment for Hamtaro to feel the feminine fragrance surround him. When he realized he smelled like a garden on a fresh, April morning, he glared at the girl.

"What was that for?"

"So you smelled nice," Bijou replied nonchalantly as she put the bottle back into her purse. "Now come on."

"No way! I have to change," he explained as he went over to his bag. As Bijou glanced at his outfit, she realized he was right: even if he did smell good, what he was currently wearing was no good for a business convention. As she glanced down at herself, she realized her outfit could pass, but she might as well change.

Bijou went over to her luggage, swiftly unzipped it and pulled out a dress bag which presumably was holding an outfit for her.

"I change in the bathroom," she said quickly as she started walking over to it. Hamtaro, feeling a bit indignant, jumped over the bed to block her.

"I believe I put dibs on the bathroom when I said I wanted to take a shower," he reminded.

"Exactly. I'm afraid you're just going to go in there and take a shower and waste our time," Bijou said dismissively. "But don't worry, I won't take long to change."

She patted his shoulder as she walked around him and into the tiled room.

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A few minutes later, Bijou came out of the bathroom with a crisp new, navy suit on. With a quick glance at her cell phone's clock, she realized they should be leaving at any momentâ€¦

As she put her phone into her purse, she looked up and saw Hamtaro sitting on his side of the bed, almost finished dressing, struggling to tie his tie.

She couldn't help but smile as she walked over to him. He looked up at her, an embarrassed blush on his face as she knelt on the floor before him.

"Need help?" she hummed as she took both ends of the tie into her hands.

"I never really had to put on one of these before," he mumbled. "But the dress code at the convention requires them." She could feel his eyes divert to the side.

"It's ok," she explained as she continued crafting the garment around his neck. "At the company, mother enforces an extremely strict dress code, too. If she catches a male worker without his tie, he gets a warning. If she catches him again, he's forced to do 10 hours of volunteer work in the human resources department.

"That's why I'm used to doing this. A lot of the younger male employees don't know how to tie one, either, so after years of scrambling to help them get one on, I guess I just kinda became good at it," she finished as she tightened the knot against Hamtaro's neck.

She folded Hamtaro's collar down as he looked at her, eyes sparkling as she smiled up at him.

"Thank you," he said in a low voice. Her smile grew, relishing one of these rare moments of his sincerity.

She put her hands on his knees and replied, "You're very welcome." She pushed off of him and stood up.

Hamtaro couldn't hide the disappointment in his eyes as she ended their contact. There was something about this whole scenario that had felt so naturalâ€|Nevertheless, he likewise stood and put on his jacket.

Bijou still had a smile on her face, not wanting to ruin the easy-going mood. No other words were spoken between the two as she opened one of the double doors and stepped out.

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Luckily, the convention was running a little late. So even though Hamtaro and Bijou arrived a few minutes behind schedule, they were still able to slip in without anyone noticing.

Hamtaro didn't feel there was a need for this "Welcoming" ceremony. They were just going to sell the employees on the company, according to the schedule of events Hamtaro was given, and Hamtaro found this completely useless sinceâ€|ummâ€|they were already working for the company.

They were currently in a large hall of the Kyoto Donaldson Botanical Gardens. The gardens were actually a few blocks from here, but this large building held the labs on the upper levels and this is where all the paperwork regarding the gardens was done.

In the many, many rows ahead of him, there were a couple hundred botanists (most of whom were much older than him and Bijou). They were chatting animatedly about plants, salaries, the latest research being done on plants in the Appalachian Mountains, etc. Since he was in the last row, he wondered if he could just rest his eyes for a momentâ€|his morning really was quite event-filled and he hadn't gotten sleep on the plane or the hotel room.

"There's Crystal!" Bijou cried excitedly as she nodded to the stage in front of the seats. This caught Hamtaro's attention, and he

followed her gaze. Sure enough, the Botanical Gardens' heiress was sitting beside a bunch of men in suits upon the stage. She didn't look bored, though she certainly looked like there were a million other places she'd rather be.

Bijou pulled out her phone and punched in a couple of numbers. A few seconds later, Hamtaro watched as she exclaimed, "Crystal! I can see you!"

Hamtaro turned away and felt that these girls got excited over the smallest things. He remembered how thrilled Bijou seemed at the prospect of having Crystal as her boss.

Though, as he looked over at her, he couldn't find any faults in her excitement. She stood up for a few seconds, allowing Crystal to see her, and then sat back down.

She just looked so happy. That unsettling feeling Hamtaro had on the plane returned as he realized he could never do anything to get her to smile like that for him. Yet all it took was seeing her friend to get Bijou all riled up.

"You guys," Hamtaro's head snapped up as he saw the heiress approach the two at the end of the seats, "You didn't tell me you were coming."

Bijou let out a small cry of joy as she and Crystal embraced in a hug.

"Well it was sorta last minute," Bijou explained as she released the other heiress.

"Hey Crys," Hamtaro nodded from his seat.

"Where's Roger? I was looking forward to seeing him again!" "never mind! You two are here and that's even better," Crystal cried as she looked over at Hamtaro.

"We should meet up later," Bijou suggested. "Maybe after the convention?"

"I'm just staying for the welcoming ceremony," Crystal explained. "The rest of the convention is to teach you science-loving botanists about some new technology that we'll be updating the labs with in the next few months." She waved her hands dismissively, obviously not interested.

"And I don't think I'm free tonight," she continued. "I'm not on October break anymore, remember? I have a Financial Markets and Instruments paper due tomorrow." She bit her lip.

"Well our plane leaves tomorrow night at one in the morning, so how about tomorrow?" Hamtaro asked.

"That works," Crystal said as she mentally checked her schedule. "The convention ends at five tomorrow, right? So I guess I'll drive by and pick you up around seven? I'll treat you guys to dinner."

"Perfect." Bijou nodded.

Crystal glanced at her watch. With a roll of her brilliant eyes she sighed.

"I better get back up there," she explained. "But don't forget to dress up nice tomorrow, ok? Bye Bij! Bye Hamtaro!"

Hamtaro and Bijou waved goodbye as she turned around and made her way back to the stage.

"Well the ceremony's gonna be some pretty boring garbage," Hamtaro said as he watched Bijou sit back down. "I'm gonna go to sleep. Wake me up when we actually have to do something."

"You are not," Bijou whispered as she pinched his arm, startling him and making him sit up straight.

"You're the one who was so excited about this trip in the first place, so the least you can do is pay attention," she reminded, her voice getting even lower as the lights dimmed around them.

When she didn't hear a rebuttal, Bijou smiled, thinking that she'd gotten his lazy-bum to listen. However, when she suddenly felt something hit her shoulder, she looked over and saw his sleeping head leaning against her.

She grabbed her temples and massaged them to relieve her mounting frustration. "_Haruna_â€|"

It was dark at the moment, so it would've been incredibly easy to punch him into waking up, but she refrained from taking any action against him. Instead, she sighed and readjusted her shoulders so that he was a little more comfortable. There was no need to cause a sceneâ€|

â€|yetâ€|

â€|because he was sure as Heke gonna get a wake-up call once the welcoming ceremony finished.

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As she glanced up at the gray sky above her, she could feel her green eyes shake slightly.

However, she wasn't going to let herself dwell on that. She looked down at her plate of food, but felt her hunger disappear as soon as she saw the color of the cloudsâ€|

Instead, she looked up at Haruna eating his food without a care in the world. Perhaps what was more unnerving than his casual state (while she couldn't seem to get into a lighter mood at the moment) was his choice in food.

Honestly, they had found a quaint little bistro that wasn't overrunning with tourists and what not. They had even secured a table just outside, enjoying the shade provided by the red-and-white-striped umbrella above them.

She had ordered a fulfilling salmon fillet with a glass of lemonade, but what did he order?

A plate of fries and a coke, as if he were in some greasy fast food place.

Bijou rolled her eyes as she watched him scarf down his food, seemingly oblivious to her stare. At long last, however, she spoke.

"How can you eat thatâ€|_ stuff_?" she asked with cringed eyes.

"Easy, Ribon," he said as he looked up at her, cobalt eyes shining, "I put it in my mouth, chew, then swallow."

"That's not what I meant and you know it," she reminded. "Haven't you ever heard of fine dining? You can't live off that filth the rest of your life, you know."

"Haven't you ever heard of enjoying what you eat?" he asked as he nodded in the direction of her untouched food.

She folded her hands across her chest.

"You're just clogging your arteries and pushing an early death," she responded, annoyance and frustration lacing every word.

"Maybe, but at least I'm not starving myself to death," he explained, once again looking at her plate full of food.

"I'm not starving myself!" she cried indignantly, causing some passersby to eye her questioningly.

"I'm just not hungry," she explained in a much lower voice.

"That's because you don't like the food you ordered. Here," Hamtaro started to say as he picked up the largest fry on his plate and dipped it into sauce. He then pushed his arm across the small table and put the fry to her mouth.

Bijou smiled, wondering how stupid Haruna thought she was.

"I don't think so," she said as she attempted to swat his hand away.

"You know you want to." He was being relentless as he pushed the fry closer to his face, making sure she could breathe in the tantalizing smell of the barbecue sauce he had coated it with.

Bijou turned her head to the side, careful not to look up, as she ignored her co-worker.

She blocked out his next few attempts, and ultimately, she heard him sigh.

"I should've expected this from a priss like you," he said tiredly.

A priss? Priss? He had called her things in the past, but on top of

the day she had just had, she was not going to take this.

She snapped her head back to him, a flame burning in her eyes.

"Excuse m  "omph!"

She felt Hamtaro shove the starchy little concoction into her mouth and sat back as she let the warm sauce coat the insides of her mouth with cholesterol and deliciousness.

Though her eyes had widened as soon as he put the fry into her mouth, they eventually softened as she started chewing, half in an attempt to not choke and half because this tasted so good.

Haruna smiled as he watched her swallow.

"Did Ribon like the food?" he asked, speaking as if talking to a child.

Not wanting to damage her pride, she wouldn't nod nor would she say "Yes". All she could do was look down and blush.

"Good Ribon!" Haruna replied, clearly satisfied.

"But don't ever do anything like that ever again," she said menacingly as she looked up at him.

"As long as you promise to keep up a healthy diet." His voice was suddenly calm, as if he were seriously concerned about her well-being.

Bijou couldn't help but look at him in a different light  "if only for a few seconds. She had been getting the strangest vibes from him lately. As he returned her stare, she knew she wasn't fooling herself. If she didn't know better  |

Thunder shook the sky, causing Hamtaro to look up and sigh.

Bijou was suddenly angry for a new reason. She gripped the sides of her chair with both hands, refusing to meet the gaze of the sky.

"As if this can be called healthy," she quietly scoffed.

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When they returned from the convention that evening, Hamtaro and Bijou were greeted by a massive vase of incredibly beautiful flowers resting atop the vanity.

"I wonder who sent them," Bijou cried, abandoning her tiredness after having such a hectic day, as she went over to them, looking around for a card.

"Probably the hotel for screwing up the room arrangements," Hamtaro suggested as he went over to the bed and plopped down. He rested his arm over his eyes, clearly not in the mood to be disturbed.

"They're from Roger," the French girl declared excitedly as she started reading. At this, Hamtaro immediately sat up straight, staring daggers into the back of his fellow employee.

"What does the card say?" he asked tentatively.

Bijou took a moment to finish reading the card before she turned around, a smile that Hamtaro had never seen before gracing her face. She leaned against the vanity as she sighed in sheer happiness.

"_Dear Bijou_," she started, her voice full of pride.

"_I just received word from the hotel about your current room situation. Rest assured, I will personally make sure that any trip I send you on in the future will _not_ have this problem. I only hope this inconvenience doesn't degrade the name of the gardens or myself in your mind. These are to remind you that, every time you see them, someone miles away feels for you and cannot wait to have you return and share with us what you've gained from this trip._

Best wishes,

Roger Asayo"

"'Dear Bijou'?" Hamtaro asked incredulously. "What about me?"

"His handwriting is so elegant," Bijou chimed, completely oblivious to Hamtaro.

"Did he have these rush delivered or something? Couldn't he wait 'til we got home or something?"

"It's so sweet!"

Hamtaro made a sarcastic sound. "It's so something alrightâ€|"

"What do you think of him?" Bijou asked as she looked up at Hamtaro, her eyes earnest as she asked his opinion.

Hamtaro would've liked her attention being on him if it wasn't for the blatant reminder in the back of his mind that all this was for another man.

And then Hamtaro had a brilliant idea.

"Well?"

Hamtaro bit his lip, looking at Bijou as he appeared confused, debating whether or not he should tell her.

"_Well_â€|He's smart, I'll give him that. And I guess if you and Crys really think he's that handsome, who am I to pass judgment? But there's a reason that I can never respect him."

Bijou's eyebrows furrowed.

"Why not?"

"The thing is," Hamtaro shook his head as he continued. "Now, just

remember that this is all a rumor so far. However, it's a rumor that's been going around the office and labs for a long time now."

"What?" Bijou asked impatiently, though Hamtaro could detect a bit of concern in her voice.

"You know how he studied abroad in Spain?"

Bijou vaguely recalled seeing Roger's resume on the local botanical gardens website and how it mentioned some schoolwork he did in Europe.

She nodded hesitantly as she watched the boy continue.

"I heardâ€¦|_Cats_, I hate spreading rumors but since you askedâ€¦|Well I heard that he got kicked out a semester early from the studying abroad program," Hamtaro ran a hand through his hair, shaking his head sadly.

"Why?" Bijou's face showed an expression of disbelief on her face.

"Harassment," Hamtaro said simply. "Apparently he stalked some girl he met and it got really out of handâ€¦|" he stopped, seeing Bijou's hurt expression. He felt soreness take over his body and he had a feeling it wasn't because of Bijou punching him on the arm to wake him up earlierâ€¦|

She was biting down on her own lip, torn between listening to her coworker and her own experience with Roger.

She, for whatever unfathomable reason, had feelings for Roger and even if Hamtaro made up some ridiculous story to get her off of his case, it still wouldn't feel right. If she wanted the stupid prick, and he wanted her, which he very apparently did, Hamtaro had no right to stand in their way.

He grit his teeth as he fell backwards onto the bed, unable to see her in such a state of confusion for stupid Asayo.

"You believe those rumors, don't you?" Bijou asked quietly, dropping the note from their boss onto the vanity. "Normally you never care what people say, so for you to actually lose respect for-"

"I don't believe them," Hamtaro cut in sharply, his voice holding a clear edge. "In fact, they have no real basis. I just made them up."

He didn't sit up to look at her, though she could hear her gasp in disbelief.

"Are you serious?" When he didn't respond, she had no choice but to continue.

"Why would you do something like that?"

Hamtaro sat up, a smile forced onto his face.

"Because I love seeing you get all worked up for no reason, Ribon."

It's quite entertaining, actually."

Bijou looked as though she could cry at his insensitivity, and that soreness Hamtaro felt earlier returned.

"Youâ€|" she started, but never got to finish.

Lightning must've struck somewhere nearby for the entire room lit up, painting everything in tones of black and white.

Hamtaro watched Bijou's hands clench into fists at her sides.

"The storm's finally coming in," she said in a strained voice. "We should probably get some rest."

He nodded, in no mood to disagree with her right now, and watched as she went over to her suitcase, picking out her sleepwear for that night.

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She wasn't sleeping. Though his back was turned to her, he could see her shadow leaning against the headboard, staring at what he guessed was the storm.

She had been like this for over four hours now, sitting perfectly still as Hamtaro pretended to sleep. If he listened very carefully, he could hear her uneven breathing through the lashing of the raindrops.

He, more than once that night, thought about turning to her and talking to her. Perhaps that would alleviate whatever pain she was feeling right now. But he knew better than to bother her when she was already in an unbalanced mood.

What bothered Hamtaro the most, though, was how he couldn't get any sleep either. His eyes kept trailing back to her shadow on the wall.

He found himself clenching his fists as he thought, '_What's wrong, Bijou?_'

He knew he would never find the answer, but he regrettably thought if his antic about Roger from before had left her in this state of insomnia.

Rather than asking, though, he chose to keep up his illusion of resting peacefully. He knew that he wasn't the person she sought out for comfort.

And that's when he felt it. Bijou got off the bed so gently Hamtaro was barely able to feel the vibrations in the bed. Hamtaro saw her shadow walk over to the bay window of the room and sit on the window seat.

Careful to not make any sounds, Hamtaro turned over slowly, eventually facing her back as she continued staring out into the sky.

Her entire bodyâ€”from her hair to the cotton of her white nightgownâ€”was bathed in an ethereal blue light. He saw her grab her bare arms and rub them in an attempt to keep warm.

As her hands rubbed her arms, Hamtaro noticed her head never moved. She was fixated on the rain.

Though he thought too soon.

For a mere few seconds, Bijou turned her head to the side. It wasn't much, but it was enough to see tears fall like liquid diamonds down her cheek before she diverted her attention back to the sky outside.

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A lot of stuff this chapter, hmm?

****Crystalgurl101-****Oh, I forgot I put Flora in there. As you can see, I actually did mean Crystal. And I'm not sure if I'd recommend juggling schoolwork and writing if you're feeling senior year stress. I think you should get your applications outta the way, focus hard on making your first marking period strong, and then take some time for yourself. I just happen to be extremely bored since my university has been drenched with rain these past few weeks, confining me to my dorm. Anyway, thanks for the review!

****Lawliet's Angel-****LOL! I loved Jigglypuff! It was one of my favorite Pokemon. Though oddly enough, I had no inspiration from him last chapter. I just thought that scene would be cute. I'm glad you liked the honeymoon suite thing, though as you can see Hamtaro and Bijou eventually got over it and it wasn't a huge obstacle or anything. I didn't know Stan and Flora was considered an actual couple, though I did know there was something there between the two. I'm pretty sure there won't be any of that couple in this fic, though who knows? Thanks for reviewing!

****LylHamGirl-****It's so nice to hear from you! I was getting worried that you'd forgotten about this fic, so you can imagine how excited I was to see that it was you that reviewed! Thank you for reviewing!

****Shadow Bijou-****Like I mentioned in Crystalgurl101's review reply, my university has been trampled by rain and that leaves me with plenty of free time. So in between studying and all, I write. You're completely right in thinking Hamtaro's maturing. In essence, the two of them don't need to mature at all, really, except when it comes to each other. I actually had a bad experience with permanent marker, so I wouldn't know if it actually comes off with soap and water. It probably does, but like I said before, I thought that it would be a nice touch. I guess I'm really impatient with uploading these

chapters since I rarely ever re-read them (I hate reading my own work, actually), so I'm sorry about that spelling mistake last chapter! I'm glad you're enjoying these quick updates. Thank you for reviewing!

****Wishbone the Lover of Books-***Hamtaro is slowly maturing, though I can't make any promises as to when he's going to become as kind as he was in the show. I really warped their personalities, didn't I? hehehâ€|I hope you enjoyed this chapter and I hope I don't disappoint!

You guys know I love feedback xD

-CN

13. A Bopping Cloud

Hey everybody! Ready for chapter thirteen?

A little reminder, though I suppose you can skip this if you'd like, that I created this entire story over two years ago, adding to the basic plot as time went by. So that's why I'm able to update so frequently. I just take the chapters (practically written word-for-word) from my mind and transfer them to a word processing program.

Another note, I wrote this story two years ago. I was still a naÃ¬ve little high school junior then, so I may disappoint. Keep this in mind, please.

****Crystalgurl101-***Hmmâ€|you wanna see Hamtaro and Bijou being fluffy? Well I guess you'll have to wait since, though I like fluff, I'm trying to build their relationship on a more mature level (that isn't to say there won't be some squee-inducing moments in the coming chapters). And I can understand why you wanted Hamtaro to reach out to Bijou last chapter, but this is a problem Bijou feels she must take on by herself at the moment, and Hamtaro understands that, though doesn't necessarily agree. Thanks for reviewing!

****Lawliet's Angel-***I'm actually not one of those people who write purely for reviews, nor do I care about the total number of reviews, really. I just get a little miffed when I see a whole lot of people reading and not giving me any feedback. I just wanna improve my skills through criticismâ€|is that too much to ask? lol Thanks for the review!

****LylHamGirl-***I'm glad you're liking the transition so far. I've tried to make Hamtaro's feelings for Bijou grow as steadily as possible, so I really hope I'm living up to your expectations! Thanks for reviewing! (lol it would be cool to see a fic of mines be a movie, but I'll leave the never-gonna-happens where they belong: in my dreams)

****Shadow Bijou-***Oh boy (takes a deep breath)â€|I'm not particularly interested in either long or short reviews, as long as I get feedback. Though I really liked your long review since you analyzed each chapter part by part, which I truly appreciated. Okâ€|Yes! I really did have fun creating the room. Actually, I shouldn't say create since it's based after a room I saw on the Home and Garden

Television (HGTV) website. I really fell in love with the room so I used it as the inspiration for the honeymoon suite. Ok, onto the next part. Crystal does indeed call Bijou 'Bij', as does everybody else close to the girl, except Hamtaro. He'll never call her that. I'm glad you liked the scene with Roger's flowers. I especially liked how you used the word 'devastating' to describe Hamtaro's excuse of using 'all worked up'. In the beginning of the story he did use that excuse to ask Bijou out, but that really was because he wanted to be mean. Nowâ€|who knows? The last part of the chapter, hmmâ€|No, Bijou's not thinking about Hamtaro's lie anymore; it's all about the storm and her fear of rain. Of course this is something you find out later in this chapter so I just kinda mini-spoiled you. Thank you for your very telling review! It really did make my day so see someone pay such importance to a chapter of _Petals_.

****WhatGoesUp-MustComeDown-***I'm glad you liked the emotion in the last part of the previous chapter! I was so hoping that I didn't make the scene too sappy or incomprehensible. I love stories with deeply-rooted emotions, so I really enjoy knowing that someone else felt that way about my stories. Thank you!

****Wishbone the Lover of Books-***The last chapter was all over the place, in my opinion, so I'm really glad you didn't feel I disappointed. So your school got rain, too? Mines was practically drenched about a week and a half ago. I do things aside from writing (if I didn't you'd get a chapter every day or so), but since I know this story has to move along and I'm so often on the computer for research (and I type 90+ words per minute), I update frequently.

Just keep in mind what I mentioned earlier.

By the way _Ce que l'homme redoute le plus, c'est ce qui lui convient_ translates to What man fears most is what suits him.

And nowâ€|Enough waiting! Let's move onto lucky chapter 13!

And as always, I'd love any feedback! So thanks for reading this chapter :)

****CN****

****Petals****

****Chapter Thirteen: **_A Bopping Cloud_**

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Sometime while she watched the sky strike the earth with its downpour, Bijou fell asleep.

Hamtaro watched the scene unfold with confusion. If she knew he was awake and watching her, she made no reference to it. She would never turn her head enough for him to catch a good glimpse of her eyes (for some reason, she was completely entranced by the weather), though the moon outside highlighted her tears brilliantly every time she did incline her head softly.

Though now, she was sleeping, albeit at an awkward angle, on the window seat. She was more sitting down against the wall than lying down, and this caused Hamtaro to subconsciously keep aware of her every movement lest she fall.

But when his gaze did leave the resting French girl, he too looked out at the sky.

The thunderstorm was ridiculously violent. They were on too high of a floor to feel the effects of any wind, though Hamtaro figured that was strong, too. Despite that, Hamtaro felt that the rain was an almost soothing backdrop; its rhythm kept steady like the beat of a song to time.

Bijou obviously didn't find anything calming about the rain. Her posture gave it away: her shoulders were slightly slumped as she looked upâ€"scared, reallyâ€"at the atmosphere beyond the glass of the window. Two or three times she actually put her hand to one of the panes of the window. It must have been cold for she visibly shivered as she pressed her pale fingers to the slightly foggy glass. What was most curious, though, was how she immediately looked at her hand as she did so, gazing at it for so long Hamtaro couldn't help but think of what was going through her head.

Did he really cause her all this trouble? He had been sitting up for a while now, observing her in her most vulnerable state. She had had a bad day yesterday, but it was only after he played his little trick (if you could even call it that for it was more like a stupid lie) on her that she suddenly focused on the storm.

He ran a hand through his multi-colored hair and let out a frustrated sigh. He had been so stupid earlier. He couldn't believe he got jealous so easily.

She had a tendency to bring out the worst in him, Hamtaro noted. He was, for the most part, very friendly and willing to help his friends. He was highly curious as well and had a great sense and desire for adventure. However, these were all features of his personality that were shunned when it came to Bijou Ribon. His thoughts and feelingsâ€"everything that made him Hamtaro Harunaâ€"went askew with her. That's why these two could never be close friends; they never felt at ease with the other.

Bijou turned to her left. That wasn't good. The window was on her right and therefore there was nothing on her other side to support her. Hamtaro watched tentatively as her left shoulder started to skid against the wall. Her body was dropping.

Without knowing his own speed, Hamtaro jumped over the rest of the bed, bunching up the sheets as he kicked off them, and slid on his knees, his kneecaps hitting the bottom of the window seat, as he caught her.

By some miracle, she hadn't woken up. She was still blissfully asleep.

He let out the breath he was holding. Ignoring the pain from his knees, he balanced her head on top of his right hand and swung her legs over his left arm.

At this proximity he could feel her muscles contract and relax as she breathed. There was a surprising amount of warmth coming off of her. As Hamtaro looked at her face, he had to admit there was an almost angelic look about her, especially with her white hair being illuminated by the lunar light.

Though that façade was more or less ruined with the several tear stains streaming down the angles of her face.

For some unexplainable reason, as he looked up and out to the sky, his blue eyes "highlighted beautifully by the light" lowered in anger.

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When Bijou woke up, she found herself snug between the covers of the bed.

Startled, she sat up as quickly as her tired, disoriented body would allow. Once she blinked the sleep away from her eyes, she looked around the room.

It seemed different. She looked to her right and noticed the curtains had been drawn shut, completely removing the view from the room. She noticed that instead, the lights were on. She smiled when she realized how soft the lights actually were; they were deliberately giving the room a dark and sensual appeal.

She was then reminded of her missing "roommate". She looked on the bed and noticed he wasn't there. She thought about where he could be for a moment. As a sudden thought hit her, she anxiously grabbed her purse off the nightstand beside her and found her phone; she checked the time, and was confused: today's part of the convention wouldn't start for another few hours, so where did Hamtaro go?

"We have plenty of time, but you should probably start getting ready soon," a voice said from the corner of the room.

Bijou nearly jumped out of the bed when she heard him. She looked to the corner and saw him, almost hidden by the shadows, sitting on a black recliner. He was already dressed in his mandatory suit and tie (Bijou, admittedly, was incredibly impressed he got that tie right the second time around), though with how his head seemed to keep leaning onto his hand, she figured he must have been incredibly tired.

"Get a move on, Ribon. I know I'm quite irresistible, but you can gawk at me some other day." At his words, Bijou realized she was staring at him. She shook her head as she pulled the covers off of herself. ("Funny, Haruna," she somewhat slurred as she went past him.)

She walked over to her suitcase, shivering after leaving the warmth of her bed in just her nightgown, and pulled out her toiletries kit.

As she went past him, she made sure to get one fast yet good enough look at him. There was a reason she had stared at him in the first place.

She knew there was something off the moment she had heard his voice. It had hints of more than just sleepiness.

Bijou closed the door to the bathroom behind her. She took a moment to lean against the door and think.

Why was he sad?

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The two Ham-Humans walked grudgingly down the hallway. Why couldn't the elevator be any closer? Even though the two of them had taken showers, washed their faces, brushed their teeth, fixed their hair and packed their things for this evening's flight home, neither of them felt awake at all. Of course, neither felt like asking about the other's apparent state of fatigue.

Though, Hamtaro really wished he could find a way to ask Bijou about what she was going through the night before. These were the thoughts that plagued his mind as he walked down the hall, nearly bumping into the walls as he took his lopsided steps.

Luckily, even though the honeymoon suite was on one of the highest floors, they got their own elevator for this deluxe room, so they didn't have to wait for one to come up.

As soon as they stepped inside, Hamtaro leaned his head against the wall. Looking at him made Bijou rub her eyes, trying to eliminate any signs of exhaustion; they did, after all, have to look professional for the convention.

"You know, Ribon," the man started to say as the elevator doors slid shut, "I'm sorry."

At this, Bijou found herself more awake than she had been all morning.

"Whatâ€¦?" she cleared her throat of all its sleepiness before she continued. "What do you mean?"

"About thatâ€¦stupidâ€¦joke I played on you yesterday. The one about Mr. Asayo," he explained as he yawned. He wanted to take this seriously, but he was just too sleep-deprived to focus on the situation.

Bijou closed her eyes as she thought. She was still confused over exactly whatâ€¦.ohhhhhâ€¦.okâ€¦

"That," Bijou let out a yawn as well before she went on, "was indeed

stupid. But I forgot about that." She didn't know if adding that last part was the best idea since she didn't want him to take his bad deed lightly, but she was in no mood to argue when he was apologizing.

"Really?" Hamtaro asked, clearly surprised and suddenly getting a bolt of energy. He suddenly looked at her, analyzing her for any signs of lying. "Are you sure?"

Bijou nodded, returning his stare with an equally confused look of her own.

"Didn't really bother me that much. I should've expected something like this from you, really," she reminded as she crossed her hands over her chest.

All the energy Hamtaro had just felt came swooping down in one horrible crash.

But before she got a chance to see his face, he put on the biggest smile he could as he replied, "I guess you're right, Ribon."

Bijou noticed they had a few more floors to go. She sighed, unable to completely push the thought from last night out of her mind. This happened every stupid time there was a thunderstorm. She couldn't eat, couldn't sleep—she couldn't do anything because of the rain. It made her clench her fists again, and she could feel the beginnings of tears brim her eyes.

"You really like him, don't you?" she heard him ask, breaking her from her train of thought.

It didn't take her long to figure out what he was talking about this time.

She felt the tears dissipate as her eyes softened. A blush formed on her cheeks and she knew she must've looked like a completely smitten idiot, but a smile spread across her lips as she thought.

"When I'm with him—I don't know—something inside me feels at ease. He makes it so easy to talk to him, and to be honest I like all the time I spend with him," she explained, though a panicked look immediately replaced her previously serene one as she realized what she just admitted and to whom.

"Umm—err—I mean—"

"It's fine; I won't tell anybody," Hamtaro responded with the smallest of smiles on his face as he looked to the side.

Bijou's expression changed. There it was, again. What was with his sudden melancholy disposition? Maybe his sleep deprivation made him touchy? She should try to act as gently with him as possible.

"Hamtaro," she said softly, startling him with the use of his first name, "you're—"

The elevator doors opened, and Bijou nearly did a double take as she saw through the main doors.

Leaving Hamtaro hanging, she practically ran to the entrance and looked helplessly to the gray sky outside.

She had forgotten—how could she be so stupid? She was thinking about the rain practically all morning and then she forgot that it was most likely still pouring outside.

Hamtaro appeared at her side, looking out at the sky with her. There was a reason he closed the curtains this morning.

"I—I need my umbrella," the European girl said in somewhat of a strained voice, keeping her eyes at the sky. She thought about where her umbrella was. She was going to pack one in her purse the morning she was getting ready to leave for her flight to Kyoto. She had laid her passport and her ticket on her bed along with her umbrella. Then, she dropped her passport as she was packing it and bent down to pick it up and then got up and left her room—

Suddenly, Bijou looked in her purse, remembering that she hadn't seen it ever since she arrived.

No, her mind screamed as she realized that she had come to Kyoto _sans_ umbrella.

What was she going to do? She couldn't go outside—not while it was raining!

Her world was closing in. She had to think of something—"fast"—that would excuse her from going out in this weather. She wasn't feeling well? A surprise case of food poisoning? She could blame it on that fry Haruna fed her yesterday—

But then, she felt it. Haruna grabbed her hand and put something into her palm, closing her fingers around the object. His hand let go as quickly as it came.

Once he removed his hand, Bijou saw it. It was little and white with a navy blue handle.

She felt her heartbeat come down from the skyrocketing levels it was at a moment ago.

"Where'd you—where'd this come from?" she asked, disbelief in her every word, as she looked at the man standing beside her.

"Jacket pocket. If you mean where I _bought_ it from, it was the hotel gift shop," he answered calmly. "Now we should get moving; we're blocking the doors."

Bijou looked around and quickly moved to the side once she realized she was indeed stopping the flow of traffic. Hamtaro followed suit.

She looked at the umbrella in her hands.

"This is yours; you bought it," she said as she pushed the umbrella to Hamtaro's chest.

"I have one," he explained, pulling out an orange umbrella from his

right jacket pocket. Cats, how many did he have in there? "That one I bought this morning for you."

Bijou's eyes lowered in confusion. She brought the umbrella back to her and stared at it before looking back at Hamtaro.

"Why?"

Hamtaro smiled as he looked down at the girl.

"Because I knew you'd be too air-headed to remember to bring one."

Oddly enough, Bijou returned his smile as he said this, and she couldn't hide her gratitude.

"Thank you," she cried as she stood on her toes and hugged him, bringing her head right under his nose. Her arms encircled around his neck as she continued. "This really does mean a lot to me."

Now it was Hamtaro's turn to be startled. He simply stood there, looking like a completely frozen imbecile, as she thanked him. All too soon, she let go, and, after smiling at him one last time, she stepped outside the doors and opened the umbrella.

Her smile simply grew as she saw the navy hotel insignia sewn onto the white cloth. That was always her favorite color combination, after all.

She wouldn't have to walk far, she reminded herself. Flora was there to drive them to the convention. Of course, given the rush of buses and taxis as well as other passenger cars jamming in front of the hotel, it was next to impossible to park a vehicle here. That's why Flora has asked them to meet her in the nearest local parking lot; it was only a block away, after all.

A block, right? Not so bad...

Even with her new umbrella firmly in her hands, Bijou could still feel her heartbeat steadily start pounding louder and louder in her ears.

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Bijou Ribon was a vision in the rain.

They didn't have to walk far—a block at most. But she was speeding off ahead of him, and more than once he had to call out "Slow down, Ribon!" to get her pace to falter.

His own pace faltered, though, whenever she turned around to his words.

He had always criticized her hair color, calling her "granny" for the longest time when they were in first grade because of its incredibly odd color. Though she had repeated time and time again that her hair's appearance was quite "normal" where she came from, he never failed to point out what an alien she was in this part of the

world.

Every time she turned and looked at him, a pleading look in her eyes to quicken his pace, he felt his eyes widen.

Her hair was almost shining against the bleak colors of the stormy sky and the neutral colors that seemed to be everywhere except her. Even around them, Hamtaro only picked up on the monotone color scheme, going as far to block out his orange umbrella, making Bijou's hair and her likewise white umbrella stand out incredibly, almost creating a glow around her.

So as she looked back at him, with her brilliant hair matted slightly against her face and her emerald eyes, enhanced unbelievably by the shine of her hair, Hamtaro felt himself stop.

When they were almost to the parking lot, Hamtaro decided that he was very comfortable walking behind her. He liked keeping an eye on her and being able to easily spot her against the washed-out colors of everyone else on the street. She was like a bopping cloud in a field of charcoal, truly a one-in-a-million sight.

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As Flora drove the car through the busy streets of Kyoto, Hamtaro noticed something off with his co-worker and it wasn't her aversion to the rain.

She rubbed the window with her hands, clearing away the condensation to get a better look of the city outside. As she stared at the buildings outside, she looked a little distracted, looking back to see the street names.

"We didn't get to explore Kyoto much, did we?" he asked. Without turning her gaze, Bijou nodded.

"Maybe we'll get to explore later," she said quietly. "When we go to eat with Crys. Kyoto is one of my favorite cities."

The car stopped at a red light, and that's when Bijou's behavior became even stranger. She immediately wiped away all the blurriness she could from the window and gazed straight out, looking directly at a building across the street.

For a few seconds, her posture straightened, and though it was only through a reflection, Hamtaro saw her eyes soften, almost like a mother watching her child at a school play.

Bijou was staring directly at the Kyoto branch of Ribon Jewelers. For a moment, her head lowered, covering her eyes in darkness. Hamtaro watched the scene play out wearily, wondering if she was going to start to cry.

However, she looked back out to the street just as the car started to move again. There was the smallest of smiles on her face.

Even if she preferred science to business, Hamtaro noted, that company still belonged to her and she must have had a deep love for

it, despite not wanting to head it one day.

"You might be a good CEO one day," he said calmly to her as he looked the other way. He heard Bijou let out a small laugh.

"_Ce que l'homme redoute le plus, c'est ce qui lui convient_," She said as she pressed her head against the seat and sadly closed her eyes.

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Hamtaro lay on the hotel bed, completely exhausted.

For the past two days, his mind had been crammed with the most rules, lectures, technology seminars and research sessions that he had ever seen in all his twenty-one years.

Today, they got to go to about seven different lectures involving something or other on plant technology. Though he loved working in the lab with microscopes and samples, he had seen enough to willingly do paperwork for the next five weeks.

Bijou was right when she said they only sent the lower employees to these things; he couldn't imagine anyone with a higher rank doing this kind of stuff.

Well, the 'business' part of the trip had ended. Hence why Hamtaro was using this downtime for as much rest and relaxation as possible. He knew he wasn't going to sleep anytime tonight for he had dinner plans with Crystal in a little while and their flight left past midnight tonight.

It didn't matter much, anyway. When he and Bijou got home, they'd still be on October break. He would catch up on his sleep then. Though for now, he was going to take a nap.

So that's how Hamtaro _almost_ ended up asleep. However, as luck would have it, the phone rang.

Groaning, Hamtaro reluctantly rolled over and grabbed the receiver when the phone was on its last ring.

"Hello?" he asked groggily, unable to hide his annoyance.

"Hamtaro? I'm glad I could catch you," the voice of Roger Asayo replied from the other end of the line. Hamtaro immediately sat up, putting a hand on his forehead as he started speaking.

"Hi, Mr. Asayo. Is everything alright?" It was the only question he could ask as he considered why their boss would bother calling.

"Everything's mostly going well, but I need to inform you that there have been a couple of changes in your schedule."

"Like what?" the orange-and-white-haired Ham-Human asked curiously.

"Your flight doesn't leave at one a.m. anymore," his boss explained. "Due to a storm that's working its way north, the flight has been delayed until 2 p.m. tomorrow."

"Really?" Hamtaro asked excitedly, thinking about how much more sleep he could now get. "Is there anything else, Mr. Asayo?"

"Let me checkâ€|No, that was the only change. But the convention ended already, I see. I'm guessing everything went smoothly?"

"The convention was fine, Mr. Asayo. Incredibly informative," Hamtaro admitted; to be fair, he wasn't lying.

"I heard they did a demonstration of the new scanning microscopeâ€|Hold on, Hamtaro. I have another call coming in. We'll pick this up when you return, alright?"

"Alright," Hamtaro replied, and a couple of seconds later, he heard the dull beep of the call ending.

So now he had over twelve more hours to rest and possibly get to see a little more of Kyoto while he was at it. This was most definitely good news.

"Who were you talking to?" he heard Bijou ask as she came out of the bathroom. She was fully dressed for dinner in a white dress and cosmetics bag in her hand.

"Mr. Asayo," Hamtaro replied unexcitedly. As Bijou walked over to the vanity, she stopped for about a millisecond before she pulled out some concealer from her bag.

"Oh? What did he want?" Though she was focusing on getting her make up on properly, Hamtaro could still tell she was far more interested in what he had to say than she was letting on. Of course, that was to be expected after what she had told him in the elevator this morning.

"Our flight's been pushed back to tomorrow at 2," he said, sounding a little bored as he put the phone down.

Bijou took a moment to let this information settle in.

"Alright," she said as she looked at two different lip glosses in her hands. Which one would look best? "Did he say anything else?" she asked tentatively, glancing at Hamtaro for a couple of seconds before choosing the light pink gloss.

"If you're wondering whether or not he asked about you," Hamtaro started to say as he pulled a dress shirt out of his bag, "Sorry to say, Ribon, but the answer's no."

Though he wasn't really sorry at all.

"No, I wasn't wondering that at all," Bijou responded quickly, though as Hamtaro looked up from his bag he could tell she was doing her best to hide her disappointment.

"I'm sure he can't wait to see you," he quickly supplied, not wanting to see her get distraught.

"Maybe," Bijou replied softly, looking down at the vanity and contemplating something heavily.

Hamtaro walked past her and into the red and black bathroom. As he closed the door, he practically cursed in frustration.

Stupid Asayo! Even when he was delivering good news he always messed things up.

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"I'm so glad the storm's over," Bijou explained as she looked out the lobby doors. Though the evening skies were still slightly gray, all the weather reports had said that there would be no more rain in the Kyoto area tonight, a fact that heavily pleased Bijou (though she still kept the umbrella Hamtaro bought her tucked safely into her purse).

"I wonder where Crys is taking us," Hamtaro mused as he leaned against the lobby wall. Bijou turned excitedly to him, her softly-curved hair, done especially for that night, swaying like bells as she spoke.

"There's this adorable Italian place that Crys and I love. They have the best chocolate cannolis you've ever tasted." Her eyes were glazed over as she thought of the delicious pastries that lined the dessert car of that particular restaurant.

"Oh, but there's also this bistro that serves the most delicious almond crepes! Ooh and a Swiss restaurant whose white chocolate fondue is to die for!" she counted off the locations on her fingers, too absorbed in her sweetly decadent fantasies to notice Hamtaro roll his eyes, despite the smile on his face.

"Listen to yourself, Ribon." His voice caused her to look up, completely confused as to what was wrong.

"You wouldn't willingly eat that one little fry yesterday, but now you're listing off as many unhealthy treats as you can think of," he reminded as he went over to her.

"That's because I'm talking about _gourmet_ food," she replied as she put her hands on her hips, annoyed at the patronizing look he was giving her.

"And those were gourmet fries. But just because they're _gourmet_ does not mean the calories are gonna be any less."

"Well the _quality_ of the food is a lot better, and food is something you should always demand the best of," she explained as she indignantly crossed her hands over her chest and looked out the doors yet again.

Hamtaro didn't bother retorting, however he couldn't help but laugh at how charming she looked at the moment.

Suddenly, Bijou's eyes lit up.

"Crystal!" she cried before she opened the doors and stepped outside. Hamtaro followed her and sure enough, Crystal and her luxurious car had just pulled up in front of the hotel doors.

"Well don't you two look cute," the heiress said, referring to Bijou's white dress and Hamtaro's black shirt, as she lowered the passenger seat window. "It makes telling you guys all the more difficult, I hope you know that."

"What do you mean, Crys?" Hamtaro asked.

"Well, daddy was so happy that the convention went well even though he didn't have to come and supervise or anything that he made dinner plans for tonight. I know we had plans and everything, but since this is the guy who's paying the rent on my high-rise apartment, I kinda have to go with him," she explained, a pained look coming across her face as she saw her friends' faces.

"I understand, Crys, but I hope you know that you're obliged to come visit us again sometime in the near future," Bijou said, putting on a smile.

"Wouldn't have it any other way," Crystal replied, returning the smile. "I'm really sorry, guys."

"Don't worry about it," Hamtaro said. "Next time you decide to treat us, I'll bring Stan with us."

Crystal's eyebrows furrowed. "Why?"

"With the amount of food he eats, we'll be even."

Crystal's smile returned.

"So no hard feelings, right?" when the other two Ham-Humans nodded, she waved, "Alright I'm off then, and remember to enjoy your last night in Kyoto!"

As her little silver automobile pulled away and drove off, Hamtaro turned to Bijou.

"Now what? Should we just go back to the room?"

Bijou put a finger on her lips and thought. "Well, we got all dressed up and everything, so maybe we should go out and explore."

"We gave Flora the night off, remember. We may have to do a lot of walking," he reminded.

Bijou thought as she moved past him, walking along the sidewalk. She turned around with a new, determined look in her eyes.

"We're in one of Japan's most bustling cities. I'm sure we'll find something."

Agreeing with her, Hamtaro came up to her and the two started to walk, quite literally, aimlessly.

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Bijou looked over the side of the bed, completely amused.

"You're awake," Hamtaro said from the floor, his tired and bloodshot eyes looking up at her.

She couldn't help but laugh at his position. "Yup. How long have you been up, Haruna?"

Hamtaro's eyes squinted. "A while. I'm just too tired to, you know, actually get up."

Bijou glanced at the clock on the nightstand. "We only have a few hours until our flight leaves, so we better get ready." She yawned, stretched, and, carefully to avoid stepping on her coworker, got off the bed.

With much more effort than was normally required, Hamtaro sat up. Bijou shook her head as she stared at him.

She extended her hand and he gratefully took it. She pulled him up, though she had to admit it required so much more energy than usual. Bijou was still so very tired from the night before.

"My head feels like something tried smashing it with a lead club," he explained, surprised at his own descriptive skills as he tried to get his vision to stop spinning.

Bijou had to admit, her head had a sharp pain, too. But it was nothing a few pain relievers couldn't fix. Haruna probably just walked into a bunch of walls or something, knowing him.

She grabbed her bag and gestured for him to follow her as she went into the bathroom, and through highly uncoordinated steps, he managed to get there in one piece.

Bijou pulled out a medicine bottle from her purse and took one of the ornate red cups. She turned on the faucet and filled it up; she then took out two pills from the bottle and put them into Hamtaro's hands.

"Just drink the water and take these. Your headache will be much better in a little while," she ordered as she left the bathroom, leaving as Hamtaro mumbled some sort of 'thank you' tiredly.

Bijou was still dressed in her white dress from the night before. She made a mental list of what she had to do before they left for their flight. Get dressed, probably take a shower, make sure they didn't leave anything behind.

At this, Bijou glanced around the room. Most of their belongings they had gathered up yesterday before they left for the convention, believing their flight would be last night.

She was pleased to see thatâ€"aside from a couple of necessities like toothbrushes and suchâ€"nothing was left. However, she felt something

cold and hard on her feet.

Confused, she looked down to see a CD. She would've thought it was one of the informational discs they had received from the convention, but, there was a messy black heart drawn on the object with a marker.

It most definitely was one of those informational discs, but just to make sure, Bijou went over to the entertainment center and put the circular object into the DVD player.

An image kept popping back into her head as she waited for the entertainment center to load the disc. Try as she might, she couldn't erase it from her mind. She turned around, cupping her forehead. She really needed to take one of those pain killers.

She heard voices, so she turned to watch what she believed was some boring infomercial on doing kelp research off the shores of Norway.

Howeverâ€¦|

She let out a cry as she brought her hands around her mouth, her eyes widening so much they almost hurt. But she couldn't care about that at the moment.

Hamtaro came out of the bathroom just in time to see the scene unfold on the screen, causing him to cough out some of the water he had just recently swallowed.

For on the screen, they watched, completely horrified, were two very inebriated Hamtaro and Bijou reciting their vows.

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><p>"Only in growth, reform, and change, paradoxically enough, is true security to be found."<p>

â€"Anne Morrow Lindbergh

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14. Chocolate and Vanilla Swirl

****CN****

****Petals****

****Chapter Fourteen:**** _Chocolate and Vanilla Swirl_

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The night before.

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Watching Bijou Ribon look through the menuâ€œwell, it was really the _dessert_ section rather than the actual menu that she was interested in, Hamtaro reminded himself drylyâ€œwas like giving a kid the key to a toy store and telling them they could keep whatever they wanted.

"_I'm not really hungry,"_ she had told him when they were first seated. True to her word, she had only eaten a few bites of her pasta before shoving her plate past her. It was time to look for a savory snack.

"You already had a chocolate sundae and a slice of their cookies-n-cream pie. If I remember correctly, it was _you_ who was worried about your health yesterday," he explained just after Bijou finished ordering an almond crepe.

"This is gourmet food," Bijou reminded as she took a sip of her champagne. "You cannot compare the nastiness of those greasy, fried potatoes to the rich texture of the delicacies here."

"Or maybe you just have a sweet tooth and want to relieve the stress you've been under from school, work, your mother and everything else in your life by indulging in these sugary sweets," Hamtaro analyzed. He smirked at her, almost challenging her to find fault in his observations.

He watched Bijou's emerald eyes widen slightly. Against the dark background of the restaurant, the candle at their table gave her face "particularly her eyes" an intangible softness that Hamtaro found himself noticing for what wasn't the first time that night.

She looked across the table at him, then downwards to the flowers and their multicolored petals decorating the base of the candleholders. Her face suddenly donned a smirk as she looked back at her dinner partner.

"You're hypothesis isn't all that astute," she lied. She nonchalantly lifted her left hand and started to touch one of the blue petals that she found particularly attractive, letting its velvety texture rub off on her soft fingers.

As she returned to his gaze yet again, she found herself about to ask him something like why he could tell that about her, but whatever she wanted to say was interrupted when a waiter came over to Hamtaro.

"That's enough," Hamtaro said a little unenthusiastically when his glass had been filled with the drink. Truth be told, he wanted to know what Bijou looked so eager to tell him just a moment earlier. As he sipped his drink, he couldn't help but smirk; Boss used to call him dense about girls, and now he was confident he could read Ribon like a book.

"What's the occasion?" the waiter asked the two Ham-Humans as he picked up Bijou's empty plate (which just a few moments earlier had a very hearty looking piece of pie on it).

"No occasion, really," Bijou explained as she looked at the man. "Just enjoying a night on the town."

"You have quite the appetite for our desserts. She must cause quite the dip in your wallet every time you go out for dinner," the waiter mused, now talking to Hamtaro.

"Oh, I don't take her out to dinner," Hamtaro explained. Bijou put a hand to her forehead and wondered why she was cursed with such a naïve coworker. When Hamtaro finally noticed the perplexed look the waiter was sending him, he sweatdropped.

"I mean "she's not" we're not actually"

"We're just friends," the French girl finished as she tucked her hands under her chin and smiled at the waiter.

Hamtaro's eyes went directly to Bijou's smiling face as she said this. She didn't have a sarcastic expression on her face and her voice didn't hint of any sort of malice.

Friends.

This was the first time she had ever referred to him as such.

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"I don't exactly call this enjoying a night on the town," Hamtaro said as he and Bijou walked out of an Italian pastry shop. "You just walk into any store that looks like it has a gram of sucrose in it!"

When Bijou continued to lick at the chocolate and vanilla swirl of her gelato cone without paying any mind to her enraged coworker, steam nearly flew out of Hamtaro's ears.

"Are you even listening to me?!" he asked as he walked around her in a futile attempt to get her attention. He walked backwards as he kept focused on her face.

"I never said you had to come with me," Bijou reminded as she took another lick of her concoction. "I believe I said, 'I want to see what kind of sweets Kyoto has to offer', and you followed me like a helpless little dog who lost his master and has nowhere to go," she explained.

Hamtaro's eyes lowered in indignation. "Is that how you think of me, Ribon? Because I'll have you knowâ€"

Unfortunately, walking backwards wasn't the best thing to do at the moment. Before Hamtaro could finish the end of his sentence, he tripped backwardsâ€|

â€|on a fire hydrantâ€|

He actually landed in what looked like a most painful position on the other side of the fire hydrant: his back was pressed against the hydrant's discharge outlet and his legs looked like uncooked spaghetti with the unnaturally stiff way they were positioned.

Bijou looked up to the sky and mouthed a, 'thank you' before she moved to the fallen man.

She outstretched her hand, unable to hide her growing smile despite knowing Haruna was not going to be pleased. (Or maybe _that_ was why she couldn't stop smilingâ€|oh wellâ€|)

"I can get up myself, thank you very much," Hamtaro said acidly, pushing away her hand. Bijou's smile turned into a smirk; his back wasn't the only thing bruised tonight.

Bijou tapped a finger against her lips as her coworker struggled to get to his feet. "Hmmmâ€|" she pondered in a mock curious voice, "What was I saying about you and a dogâ€|?" she asked as she turned her gaze to him, finally standing, and the fire hydrant and then back again.

"I see you finally finished your ice cream cone," Hamtaro noticed as he brushed some dirt off his pants.

"Yezzz." Bijou immediately let out what sounded like a hiccupping sound as she placed a hand over her mouth. _Zut!_ Her accent returned when she was either nervous, talking to her mother orâ€|mhmm she should've passed on that last glass of champagne. At least now she knew why she was feeling a little giddy and light-headed. But in her defense it was an excellent year.

"What are you scowling about?"

She didn't realize how scrunched up her face must've looked while she thought. Her hands fell to her side as she tried her best to feign a smile.

"Aww I'm sorry you had to go through that, Haruna, but the night is still young! It's what, maybe 10 o'clock?"

"Last time I checked it was half past midnight," Hamtaro said tentatively. "Remember, the ice cream-gelato place shopkeeper said they had an early morning special?"

At this, Bijou glanced up and realized how dark it was for the first time that night. Her worry over her lapse in time judgment didn't last long, though.

"The moon is so pretty," she breathed out, looking at the celestial object which looked as though it was hidden behind a circular cave of clouds. She immediately shook her head. _Focus, Bijou! It was just champagne. Fruit juice, really._

"We can head back to the hotel if you want-"

"-it's only fair that since you followed me around all night like a little doggy that you get to choose whatever it is that you wanna do, Haruna," Bijou said patronizingly as she waved her hands dismissively.

Ribon did not know exactly how much power she had given to him at that very moment. As she twirled a lock of her curled hair around her finger, Hamtaro needed to think of something vile and disgusting and that Ribon would have nightmares about as long as his back hurt because of that dumb fire hydrant incident.

"Alright," he said acceptingly, glancing around the streets for the nearest oneâ€|

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Wherever he was taking her, Bijou realized, this was not going to be good.

It was probably the way he insisted on holding her hand as he led her through the nightlife of Kyoto, almost ensuring no possible means of escape.

But if she were to be perfectly honest, she wasn't complaining. She was still so very tired from the convention and she had had too much to eat and probably a little too much bubbly to navigate herself

through the busy city.

Though, occasionally Haruna would stagger as he avoided running into people on the streets. Bijou wondered if this was just natural awkwardness to avoid collision or if he was feeling slightly dizzy himself.

She was perceptive enough to notice the streets lights becoming fewer and farther in between. The bright, blasting lights of the city had long been abandoned when Haruna first grabbed her hand. He was purposefully leading her somewhere where there wouldn't be a ton of people.

She bit her glossed lip as she considered the possibilities. What if he took her to an abandoned warehouse or something and left here there? No, he wouldn't do that. Or would he? He looked nice in black.

"_Zut alors, Bijou!_" she said aloud at her lack of thinking skills at the moment. The best idea right now was to tell Haruna to call a cab and take her home. However, she didn't quite realize fate had another thing in mind.

"Ahahhh," she looked up as she heard the man speak. "There we go."

It took Bijou much longer than she thought it would have to read the sign on the store.

"It's a pub," she realized after staring at the building for a good two minutes.

Hamtaro said nothing as he looked at the store with pride.

"No way," Bijou said, yanking her hand away. "Those places are greasy and smelly and dirty and greasyâ€|"

"You said I could do as I want," Hamtaro reminded.

Bijou kept her gaze on the building as she continued, "But there are limits, Haruna."

"Come on, it'll be fun."

"No! It's filled with men in leather jackets and women with seventeen piercings on _one _ear!" Bijou exclaimed, turning to Hamtaro and holding out four fingers for no particular reason. She winced, immediately shutting her eyes as tight as possible. This slow, downward spiral always happened when she had a bit too muchâ€|luckily, she wasn't full-on hammeredâ€|yetâ€|

"It's something your mother would hate for you to do," Hamtaro explained.

"If you wanted to scare me or whatever, Haruna, it worked, but I am not stepping foot inside there! I told you, it's greasy and nasty and hey! Hey! He's kinda cute!"

Bijou saw a man, who slightly resembled Roger, Hamtaro noted bitterly, that she apparently found 'cute' through the window.

Throwing complete and utter caution to the wind, she walked in.

Well, Hamtaro wasn't expecting that. He hoped he would scare her and then they'd be off. He supposed that now he had to get herâ€|

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"You're so dumb Ribon!" Hamtaro exclaimed as he watched his coworker sit down at a bus stop. "Buses don't run this late."

"I'm not waiting for a bus, stupid," the girl replied, sounding much like a seven-year-old telling a five-year-old that this part of the park was for 'big kids' only. "Iâ€|amâ€|"

"An idiot?" Hamtaro finished for her.

"Yeah you are!" Bijou erupted into a fit of laughter.

Hamtaro would've retorted, but Bijou immediately started patting the seat beside her excitedly.

"Sit down, Haruna!"

"Why?" he asked, though he was already moving to get next to her.

"Because I'm cold," she admitted. When he settled down by her, she tilted her head onto his shoulder in a very uncoordinated movement. As she did so, Hamtaro could feel heat on his cheeks that he was almost positive had nothing to do with all the alcohol the two of them had just consumed.

"Hi, moon," Bijou said, though she was looking down at the cement sidewalk. "You know, Haruna, I was looking at the moon last night."

"Were you?" Hamtaro replied, completely forgetting that he had watched her that entire night as she did so.

"Yeahâ€|it was mostly because it was raining. To be honest," she moved her head and looked Hamtaro straight in the eyes. "I don't like the rain."

"How come?" Hamtaro asked.

Bijou's eyes softened. Keeping their gazes locked, she took in a deep breath. "It started when-

The sound of a giant truck rushing past them, causing a giant uproar of water to come dangerously close to the bus stop, interrupted Bijou. She looked out at the street long after the truck had passed. She hadn't noticed it before, but all of a sudden she couldn't take her eyes off of it.

"What's wrong, Ribon?"

Bijou squinted her eyes as she got up. She pointed across the street to a little building with an alarmingly bright, white sign.

"What eez zat?" she asked, letting her accent slip through.

Hamtaro came beside her and looked out at the sign.

"The Red Cherub Chapel," he read. "We have a nightly special of one hundred dollars."

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A few hours later.

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"And I pulled the hundred dollars out from my wallet," Hamtaro remembered.

Bijou's mouth hadn't closed ever since the DVD had started. She was now sitting on the bed, after having watched the dumb video about three times, with Hamtaro sitting beside her and recalling the night's events.

There was an eerie silence in the room as the two Ham-Humans thought, looking away from each other. Hamtaro put his face into his hands, grabbing his hair as he cursed to himself. He knew what he had done. Honor meant everything to this girl and her family, and in a single night, he had helped her take that away.

Bijou got up from the bed, startling Hamtaro. She went over to the dresser and stared at the flower vase resting atop the wooden surface. She pulled a few petals off and took in a bracing breath as she let them fall out of her hands.

She felt them, the scorching tears burning trails down her cheeks. She was also aware of her whimpering but she really couldn't care less.

Almost instinctively, Hamtaro found himself behind the girl. He hesitated for a moment before he outstretched his hand to touch her shoulder.

However, when his hand was within an inch of her body, she turned around.

Her breathing was shallow as she was still crying. Her face was red and the tears fell like water from a faucet down her normally-pale face.

The look in her eyes said everything. The emotion was hard to name, but it had a look of pity and regret and sorrow mixed in there. She hated him. She hated him and what they had doneâ€|

â€|but most of all,

â€|she loathed herself at this very moment.

She pushed past him and went onto the bed. She crawled over to the headboard and sat against it, curling her legs up to her body. She felt goosebumps, and ultimately she realized there was a draft in there.

She leaned her head against the bed as tears started to fall faster down her face, watching the flower petals she just discarded blow in the wind. "What have I done?"

"It's not the end of the world," Hamtaro said quietly as he watched the girlâ€"God, she was now his _wife_â€"unfold before him. "We can fix this."

Suddenly, he watched as her whimpering stopped and she sniffled.

"How is it not the end of the world?" Bijou cried as she looked up. "The one time I do something on my own, something my mother didn't want me to do, this business trip! She didn't want me to take the job at the botanical gardens; she knew science wasn't where I belonged. And look what happened! I go on my first business trip without her and make a mess of everything!"

Immediately, she started wiping her face furiously, burning it with the friction of the skin on her hands. She also swung her legs over the bed and got up.

"We need to go to the chapel," she explained as she faced the man. "We need to make sure that what we just saw isn't some sort of hoax or isn't actually real or something crazy like that!" she crossed her hands across her chest and grabbed her elbows.

"Of course, but we should probably change first," Hamtaro reminded, using a much softer tone compared to Bijou's frantic one.

Bijou looked down at her white dress. One glance in the mirror showed her tired eyes, and her curled hair coming undone.

"Our plane home leaves in a couple of hours," she remembered as she put a hand over her face.

"We can postpone our flight," Hamtaro suggested.

"We'll deal with that later. Let's just get dressed and go, Haruna." With a sudden realization, Bijou felt a film of tears build up in her eyes as Hamtaro bit his tongue, not wanting to say it.

That was now her last name, too.

"At least," Hamtaro said, trying to lighten the mood as much as the situation allowed, "We didn't end up in bed together. You knowâ€|ummâ€|_like properly_."

Bijou cringed and pinched the bridge of her nose, the tears brimming her eyes becoming more evident. No words were needed as she turned around.

Twenty minutes later, the two freshly-dressed Hamtaro and Bijou went

to the double doors of their suite. Bijou inwardly groaned as she saw what was supposed to be their marriage certificate on the table beside the door. Hamtaro picked it up, noticing Bijou's distressed state getting more and more panicked.

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****Deleted Scene ****(You can thank ****Shadow Bijou**** for me actually putting in this scene when I originally took it out)

Ummâ€¦Imagine this sometime in between Hamtaro and Bijou find out that their flight doesn't leave until much later and their dinner with Crystal.

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"I told you taking the honeymoon suite wasn't a bad idea," Hamtaro reminded as he and Bijou, both clad in dark blue bathrobes, walked down a currently empty hallway.

Bijou didn't say anything as she rolled her eyes. Hamtaro took her silence as her admitting that he was indeed right, so he continued.

"The bed situation worked out fine, we're not paying a cent for one of the finest rooms in the entire hotel, and now we get the hot springs all to ourselves as an apology for them screwing up our reservations!" he exclaimed as he clapped his hands together.

"Yeah, but their letting us have the hot springs right before they clean them, meaning that it's all dirty from people spending their time in them all day," Bijou shook in disgust.

"You're the only person who would complain about a situation like this," Hamtaro said, tugging the light blue towel from around his neck into his hands. He opened the door that separated the paths that led to the girl and boy hot springs, respectively.

Bijou nodded in thanks and made her way down the girl's path. Hamtaro watched her figure retreat for a moment before setting off his own path.

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A fake, gray mountain was what separated the two hot springs. Normally, they were a social pit of women on one side and men on the other. Right now, though, it was after the springs had closed to the public. This was the time the hotel had allotted Hamtaro and Bijou.

It was a bit chilly, Bijou noticed as she tightened the towel around her body. But the springs were still bubbling with steam and incredibly inviting waters. Bracing herself for the chill that was about to consume her, she quickly removed her towel and went into the water.

She crossed her arms on the edge of the springs and laid her head on them. Letting out a relaxing breath, she was incredibly happy she could get this opportunity, though she would never let Haruna know that.

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Hamtaro stretched out his hands and let his head lean against the edge of the springs. He closed his eyes and let the rest of his body relax. He wasn't a firm believer of going to spas and getting massages and all that prissy-sounding stuff, but he wasn't gonna lie: this felt pretty damn amazing.

And he knew Ribon was enjoying this, too. He wished he could go over there on the other side of the mountain to see her. Hamtaro opened his eyes and felt red creep onto his face. That didn't come out rightâ€

â€Recollecting his thoughts, he decided he wanted to go over there to see the look on her face that she was actually enjoying her stay here only so that he could rub it in her face.

Yeah, that was it, he decided.

He spent the next few minutes happily enjoying the feeling of the waterâ€though, as he felt some strange movement near his feet, he had this odd feeling like there was something in the water.

He smirked at his stupidity. He was acting like one of those stupid kids in a shark movie. Then again, those kids were normally considered stupid because they didn't leave the water when they had the chance.

Hamtaro's face fell as this thought hit him. He didn't want to go underwater and check, after all, this was a hot spring. Butâ€

He nearly jumped out of the water as he felt something slide past his foot. It was way too long to be considered a fish.

Or maybe he really was imagining things. Maybe he was under a lot of stress lately and he was starting to feel things that weren't actually there.

Cats! There it was again!

This couldn't possibly be all in his head. Groaning at what he had to do, he took a large breath and went underwater.

Thankfully, the water was clear and things were easy to spot. He looked around as far as he could: nothing there. He turned around, and once again: nothing there.

He resurfaced, his shoulders shaking due to the exposure to the brisk air. If anything, he knew there was nothing to be worried about. Therefore, as he felt more movement beside his foot, he quickly decided to humor himself to erase any suspicions. As he went into the water, he didn't expect to find anything. Howeverâ€¦

â€¦It was long, green and as Hamtaro got closer to the thingâ€¦"wait, did it just _hiss_â€¦"ok screw this! Those were _fangs_.

Whatever that eel thingy was it had spotted Hamtaro. Without a second to spare, Hamtaro jumped up and cried out as he felt a small tinge against his foot. Was that thing able to conduct electricity?

He wasn't sticking around to find out.

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Bijou looked up as she heard Hamtaro make a strange sound. She grabbed her temples. What was Haruna doing? Maybe he had just gotten into the water and was too dumb to realize how hot the water actually was. He was making a lot of splashing.

She blushed as she thought, _"You're too loud, Haruna!"_

Couldn't he quiet down a little? She heard more splashing. Maybe she should go over there and see if everything was alright? For all she knew he could've been drowning. She didn't want to return home with him in a body bag.

Quickly, she grabbed her towel from the edge of the springs and hoisted herself out of the water. She immediately wrapped herself in her towel and hugged the terry cloth fabric to her body as she shivered in the cold. Her bathrobe was left in the cubby at the end of the hot spring hallway. She would get that and then return to see if Haruna was alright.

Just as she was about to leave, she heard a sharp intake of breath behind her.

Noâ€¦he couldn't have...

Bijou turned around to see Hamtaro, with a towel wrapped his waist and one hastily thrown over his neck, staring at her. She saw his chest muscles rise and fall with shallow breathing. The muscles of his arms, which Bijou found herself staring at for a second, contracted as he suddenly tensed.

"What's wrong, you were making so much noise," she said, shaking her head slightly, remaining in her spot as she turned around completely.

Hamtaro took another sharp breath.

"You're a lot slower than normal," Bijou joked. Oh the irony of it allâ€¦

Hamtaro looked up at her face for the first time since he arrived, a blush burned onto his cheeks.

Bijou's eyes lowered as she tried to understand. "Whaâ€|?"

His eyes had been locked on her figure as soon as he arrived. Her pale legs, her arms, her shoulders, the ends of her hairâ€|all of them glistening with water droplets in the light. The outline of her figure in that towel which really probably could've been a bit longer. She looked _so_ â€|

Bijou finally understood why he was looking so flustered. She found her face flushing as well as she turned her back to Hamtaro, praying that he would just go away.

"Eelâ€|umm," he coughed nervously, "I think there was an eel in the springs."

"Alright," Bijou said quickly as she tapped her wet foot impatiently against the stone ground.

"I'm gonna go now," Hamtaro said, breaking the building tension in the area.

Bijou nodded her head quickly. Why would he just leave? Or better yet, why was she still staying here?

"I'll see you when we go to dinnerâ€|"

"Ok, bye!" Bijou encouraged, turning her head slightly to the side.

Hamtaro felt like slapping himself. She seemed to have this ridiculous effect on him whenever her clothing wasâ€|abbreviated. He was a pig. Reallyâ€|he couldn't help but take one glance at her figure from behind before going to his side of the mountain.

As he looked down at the hot springs, he shook his head.

The last thing he needed right now was a hot bathâ€|

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****Crystalgurl101-****I'm glad you liked it. Told ya when the twist came, you wouldn't need me to tell you. There's much more to the story now. I hope you like what I have in store.

****Lawliet's Angel-****I know what episode of Full House you're talking about!! (The one with Jesse and Becky and how they almost got married?) Anyways, yes, they (supposedly) got married. They have to figure out all the details before they make any major decisions, but

I guess that's something you'll have to see for yourself.

****LylHamGirl-****I'm so glad you liked the twist! I really appreciate you sticking with this story! Thanks for reviewing.

****Sinnai Usagi-****I'm glad you liked the twist. Thanks for the review!

****Wishbone the Lover of Books-****ahhâ€¦you said "interesting" when you described the twist. Is that good or bad? (just kidding!) I always thought alright was one word, but who knows? Thanks for reviewing!

****Shadow Bijou-****There's a reason I saved your reply for last. Like I said, I wrote this two years ago, and I knew I would disappoint with this chapter. That's kinda why I said I loved chapter 12 (two chapters ago) so much, since it was before the twist and before, in my opinion, this story went downhill. Moving on, thank you for catching the concealer subliminal message! I thought nobody would ever get that! (And I'm pretty sure concealer is a word since that's what it says on my make-upâ€¦MS Word didn't recognize it for me, either. It was weird.) I'm sorry, but Hamtaro and Bijou were never, ever going to be shown at the convention. It's why the convention was just brought up randomly towards the end of a chapter, not really built up. As for including a scene between the two of them while they had the extra free time, as you can see, I wrote a scene for that, but since I felt that more tension wasn't needed, I cut it out of chapter 13. Just for you, though, I put it back in. As for the twist, to be honest, I felt myself nodding as I read your review. I'm not gonna lie: I didn't like chapter 13 that much either. And when I read your part about how I had some explaining to do since I didn't show them going out to dinner, I laughed (knowing what I had in mind for this chapter), so I couldn't say anything about that. I sincerely hope you liked this chapter better, and as always, thanks for reviewing.

Ahem..we had a thirteen chapter prologue.

Now, Petals begins.

-CN

15. Valentine's Day Exploded

****CN****

****Petals****

****Chapter Fifteen: **_Valentine's Day Exploded_**

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Flora did not get paid enough for this job.

Donaldson Botanical Gardens had paid her in advance to chauffeur her clients around for the length of the convention and ensure that her clients got to airport back in time for their flight.

However, if her clients insisted on being lateâ€"they were supposed to meet her here half an hour agoâ€"then that was their own problem. And she had even gotten there early to make sure she got a parking spot right in front of the hotel! Were her efforts not appreciated? Playing on-call driver was starting to become a little annoying.

So she angrily crossed her hands over her chest and leaned against the shiny black hood of the limo. _Five more minutes_â€|

"Flora!"

The blue-eyed girl turned her head to see Hamtaro and Bijou nearly topple out of the revolving doors and onto the sidewalk.

"Flora," Bijou repeated as she sighed. She sounded tired and a little distraughtâ€|That became Flora's first indication.

"Well you guys cut it a little close, but if the traffic dies down a bit, you should get on your plane in no â€|"

She stopped herself when she noticed both of her clients shaking their heads.

"Flora," Hamtaro started, his voice almost begging, "We need to go to a chapel."

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Though the two of them had been there just hours earlier, by the shocked looks upon Hamtaro and Bijou's faces, they obviously did not remember the chapel.

True to its name, the Red Cherub Chapel was indeed quite red. And pink. Plus, one could not forget the gaudy golden cherubs hanging uncoordinatedly off of every corner in the room.

"It looks like Valentine's Day exploded," Hamtaro commented as he and Bijou stood aghast at the very back of the chapel. Bijou cringed as she nodded, half astonished and half disgusted (as Valentine's Day _was_ her favorite holiday).

Despite the obnoxious colors meant to set the romantic undertones, the pews were made out of wooden benches with spots of chipping paint all over them. The walls had incredibly dated, shocking pink wallpaper with a line of red hearts travelling down the length of the wall. There were also bouquets of fake, unbelievably large red roses at either end of the pews, shrinking the already-tiny aisle (with its blood red, stained carpet) look even more miniscule.

At the very end of the room, there was a faux marble arch with a string of fake red roses woven around it.

It smelled musty, like a suede jacket that stayed in the rain too long, Bijou thought as she hesitantly took a few steps forward.

Honestly, if even she were completely hammered, she could have at least chosen a better place to make the biggest mistake of her life.

She then turned around to see the man who made that mistake with her. He was currently looking at a cherub statue sitting atop a small table that looked as though it hadn't been dusted in decades.

His face didn't show signs of distress, and she knew from seventeen years of experience that when he was worried, he let everyone know. So why did he look so unfazed when their entire worlds had collapsed last night?

"_Mademoiselle Ribon!_" A voice suddenly called out with a perfect French accent.

Bijou immediately turned around just as Hamtaro looked up. A man with graying hair who wore a tuxedo (which looked much too fancy for such a setting), stepped into the chapel from the other side of the room. Behind him, there stood a woman with pale skin and cream-colored hair, resembling the complexion of Bijou.

"Oh! _Excusez-moi!_" The man said as he clapped his hands and stopped right before Bijou. He took her hands into his and held them to his chest.

"Eet eez _Madame 'aruna_ now, eezn't eet?" he asked as his smile grew larger and larger.

"_Parles-tu francaises?_" Bijou asked as she brought her hands back to her chest, stepping back from the overly-enthusiastic man.

"_Bien sur!_ Ohâ€"and zhere eez zee lucky man 'imself!" the man cried as he pushed Bijou aside and went to Hamtaro.

"From what I could tell," the man said, speaking slowly and looking Hamtaro straight in the eyes, "sheâ€|she eez a keeper!"

"â€|umm, alright," Hamtaro said hesitantly.

"I am not!" Bijou replied indignantly. Once she realized exactly what she said, though, she sighed (mumbling a "never mind" in the process), digging into her purse. Her hand emerged with a piece of paper in her hands.

Hamtaro immediately noticed the tension rising in the room as Bijou nearly crushed the paper between her fingers. Her head had suddenly lowered as she let out a long, tired breath.

"I justâ€|_we_ just need to know if what is written on this paper and what we saw on that DVD is real," she said exasperatedly as her head rose. Her lips were trembling and it was taking her best efforts to not let her eyes tear.

Before the short man could speak, the cream-haired young woman replied.

"Well, of course it is real! My father and I run a clean business; we would never try to fool such an important fellow French woman," she assured as she put a hand on Bijou's shoulder and smiled. Her father, the chapel runner, nodded in agreement.

Hamtaro noted as Bijou's shoulders visibly slumped. A heavy feeling set into his stomach, and all he could think was what on earth were they going to do now. Bijou seemed to especially be disturbed by this news and this was more than evident through her body language. Quickly, however, a thought occurred to herâ€|

"You said 'important'," the white-haired girl reminded as she fully turned around to meet the eyes of the woman.

"_D'accord_! It's not everyday we have an heiress walk through our doors," the girl explained as she nodded excitedly.

Hamtaro immediately moved to be behind Bijou as he realized the damage control that had to be done now.

He couldn't see, but the girl's eyes were twitching and the little color in her face had vanished immediately.

"W-wh-_what_? You didn't tell anyone, did you!" the girl exclaimed as her voice rose by a few octaves.

The young woman placed a hand on her lips and thought. "Well, you were standing right there when you told us about how you were an heiress-" she pointed to the front of the chapel, "and you said something about your job in a few months. So, we looked up your name and sure enough: you were telling the truth. _Obviously_, we had to send gift baskets to the lucky parents."

The girl glanced from Bijou to Hamtaro as she said this.

Bijou completely crushed the life out of the marriage license she was holding.

"_Sacre bleu! C'est des connieresâ€|Merde! Merde! Merde merde merde!!!_" she screamed as she stepped up to the other French girl. The other French girl, on the other hand, felt herself going red at the statements Bijou kept repeating.

"Ok, whoa! Don't wanna get carried away there, do we? C'mon," Hamtaro said as he grabbed Bijou's waist. He tried dragging her out of the chapelâ€|past the chapel runner who simply smiled as he pressed a hand to his heart and mumbled something about young loveâ€|but darn, when the girl wanted to squirm she could. Her wriggling made it impossible for Hamtaro keep a secure lock on her. In fact, she was fighting to get as close to the other French girl as humanly possible, and to be honest, it was a fight she was winning.

"_Vous delirez_?!!!"

Bijou kept screaming words that Hamtaro did not understand in the slightest, though he perfectly got the lethal look she was shooting

both the man and his daughter.

"Alright that's enough." The boy did not need to deal with an angered Bijou right now on top of everything else he had just been handed. They were both in this together, but was he losing his mind? No. And that's because he was a far more collected person than she was. It was a fact he prided himself on.

So, despite the screams that did not cease, Hamtaro lifted Bijou up and threw her over his shoulder.

Ohhhâ€¦it was like lighting a match in a tank full of gasoline.

Bijou stopped moving and screaming momentarily. Just as she realized exactly what had happened, the explosion started again.

"What are you doing, Haruna?!! Put me down RIGHT NOW! NOW!!!!!!!"
NOWWW!!!!!!!"

Hamtaro pinned the girl's knees against his chest which, at the very least, restricted her legs' flailing.

"Thank you for confirming what's written on that piece of paper, and have a nice day," He said quickly as he smiled sheepishly. Without another word, and totally ignoring Bijou's failed attempts at kneeling him in the gut, he left.

Even through the wooden chapel doors: "Why aren't you listening to me! We have to go back thereâ€¦" I have unfinished business!! I hate you."

The chapel keeper and his daughter smiled in a bittersweet way as they heard Bijou's comment.

"She'll come around eventually," the girl said
naïvely.

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Something's off, Flora couldn't help but think as she saw her two clients through her rearview mirror.

For one thing, she should've been driving them to the airport by now. Instead, as soon as they came downstairs this morning, they pleaded with her to take them downtown, to a chapel nonetheless!

Then, Hamtaro comes out with an extremely angered Bijou on his shoulders, and the second he put her down, Bijou punched him in the chest. Granted, Hamtaro didn't show much pain at that very second, but as soon as the French girl turned around, the man nearly doubled over in pain before crawling into the limo.

And now, just as their flight should have been leaving for back home, the two of them were sitting as far away from each other as possible in the backseat of the limo.

Hamtaro's head was leaning against his shoulder a little

depressingly; he had most definitely seen better days.

Bijou had her hands crossed across her chest, though her face did not look nearly as stern. In fact, when Flora focused close enough, Bijou's eyes were shaking and there were most definitely sniffles coming from her direction.

What was strangest, though, was when the limo drove past the Kyoto Ribon Jewelers. Bijou's eyes widened for a fraction of a second before she let out a small cry.

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"You could calm down a little, you know," Hamtaro reminded Bijou as she violently threw her nightgown into her suitcase.

Bijou did not respond to this except for slamming down the top of her suitcase as forcefully as possible and then zipping it up as quickly as she could. Hamtaro rolled his eyes and continued packing his own bag.

"We'll just get an annulment; it's no big deal."

"If my mother knows, then sooner or later, somehow the rest of my family will know," Bijou explained as she pulled her suitcase off the bed.

"So we're gonna get a little heat from our familyâ€¦it'll pass," Hamtaro replied, pulling his bag around his shoulders.

"Not exactly." Bijou walked around the bed and past her co-worker. She went into the bathroom, doing a quick sweep to make sure nothing was forgotten, and she walked back into the bedroom.

The vase of flowers that had been sent by her boss just a little over a day earlier still sat atop her dresser. She stopped and went over to the flowers. Their petals were just as beautiful and vivid as the day they first arrived.

"My second cousin," Bijou said distantly as she bent down and smelled the flowers; their scent was ridiculously wonderful, "my second cousinâ€¦she got married, but it turns out her husband and her were completely wrong for each other. So after only four months, she got a divorce, and the rest of my family still looks down on her for it."

"And how long ago did she get the divorce?" Hamtaro asked, noting through the vanity mirror the incredibly depressed look on her face as she looked down at the flowers.

Bijou let out a small, sad laugh.

"In April it will be six years."

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Bijou hugged her long white coat against her body as the wind sent her hair flying westward. In the three days she had spent in Kyoto, the weather had taken such a bitterly cold turn, and this was particularly evident by the day's sudden uptake of fierce wind. She was lucky she remembered to pull out her outerwear from her suitcase before they left the hotel.

She saw Hamtaro pull the luggage out from the trunk of the limo and couldn't help but sigh. Rather than thinking about seeing her best friends again or informing her ridiculously handsome boss of their business trip, she could only think about the negative. The more she thought about going home, the more she focused on informing everyone in her life that she did something so incredibly stupid.

She looked up at the woman leaning against the limo. As more and more white locks whipped against her face, she tried her best to smile.

"You've been wonderful, Flora. Thank you for driving us around Kyoto for the last few days," she said, bowing slightly.

Flora beamed.

"Just doing my job, though I have to admit: I'm gonna miss you too." She put a finger against her chin as she was lost in thought. "I never meant to eavesdrop, but some of the conversations you two had were just too much! The banter between you guys was seam-splitting at some points."

"Well, Harâ€œHamtaro's just incompetent like that. You have to explain things like seven or eight times to him for him to finally get it, so spending a day with him is truly a patient-testing ritual, and really, it can take hours," Bijou explained as she waved her hands dismissively to the side.

"I don't know how his parents survived with him for nearly eighteen years," she finished.

"As if I can't say the same about you! You get overworked over anything and freak out if the smallest of things go deviating from the plan," the subject of Bijou's bashing retorted as he wheeled her suitcase to her.

"See! This is exactly what I'm talking about," Flora said excitedly as her smile grew. "I really am gonna miss you bothâ€œ!"

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The plane ride back from Kyoto was much, much more relaxed than the one they had boarded to Kyoto just days earlier.

It was quiet, though. Despite the fact that they were on an outlandishly crowded red eye (since they missed their earlier flight and all), there was one unmistakable feeling surrounding the two of them: noiselessness. Even for these two, who appreciated whenever they weren't at each other's throats, the silence was eerie.

Every movement they made, from the shuffling of their clothes against

the leathery backs of the chair to the soft humming Bijou was trying to preoccupy herself with, was magnified; frankly, it was getting a little ridiculous.

Hamtaro tapped his fingers impatiently against the armrest between the two seats. Speaking in the most nonchalant voice he could muster, he said:

"So when we get back, should we go to the nearest court and get everything settled from there?"

Bijou tore her eyes away from the cloudless sky and wondered for a bit.

"I guessâ€|" She leaned back into her seat and closed her eyes before continuing. "Though it doesn't really matter how soon we get this thing resolved."

Now, the man was confused. Wasn't she the one losing her marbles over the current situation ever since they had watched that cursed DVD this morning?

"Uhhâ€|it doesn't?"

Bijou let out a tired sigh as she shook her head.

"Not really. My family will tear me a new one, anyway, so we can go ahead and take our time." She pressed a hand against her forehead and turned to her side, hoping to get some rest before landing.

"So what happened to your second cousin's definitely gonna happen to you? But you're their heiress."

Bijou's shoulders fidgeted somewhat. "That just makes it worse!" Her words came out slightly mumbled for she pressed her mouth against the back of her seat.

"I'm supposed to represent the family's dignity, and look what I did. They'll try to take my CEO position away from me, take away my inheritance and completely cut me out of the Ribon family willâ€|"and that's only the beginning I bet. At least my cousin had a real wedding and didn't just have too much to drink," she explained, burying her head deeper into the leather.

"Hmm, I thought you didn't wanna be CEO. Couldn't this be a good thing?" Hamtaro asked. He thought he was putting a silver lining on the ominous rain cloud that had been presented over them, but he couldn't have been more wrong.

Bijou got up and turned around to give him the sharpest look she could.

Her emerald eyes were burning with ambition as she spoke. "My father entitled that position to me when I was four years old. If anything, I will be the one to decline that opportunity and not let one night from a business trip take away what was promised to me. I owe him at least that much."

Her husband put a hand over his chin as he thought. "So this is like, gonna ruin you?"

Bijou rolled her eyes at his choice of words but nevertheless agreed. "It pretty much already has."

"Butâ€¦what ifâ€¦" Hamtaro's other hand moved to his chin as he tried his best to articulate his suggestion. The French girl uninterestedly put a hand against her face as she listened to Hamtaro struggle with his words.

"What if you didn't get married while under the influence and actually had a huge wedding with all the works? Would your family get ticked at you then?" he asked as he looked over at the girl.

She immediately sat up, wondering if she had heard wrong. Was the man insane?

"You were there, remember? We didn't have a wedding with 'all the works'; we had a spur of the moment walk down the aisle complete with fake flowers and chipped wooden benches," she reminded indignantly, shocked at how he would overlook something so big.

Hamtaro laughed at the girl's angered expression. "Relax, I remember all that, alright? I was just saying that what if I wasn't just a coworker and we were actually in love when we decided to get married?" he quipped, using his hands to make air quotes as he said the words "in love".

Once again, Bijou was questioning Hamtaro's sanity. Did he censor what he said or did he just throw out everything that came into mindâ€¦?

"Do you think anyone will believe that when we ending up getting an annulment in like two days?" she asked seriously, but all that seriousness was quickly turning into frustration as she noticed him smiling.

"Seriously, I'm about to smack youâ€¦what's so amusing?"

Hamtaro was excited that he got to hold something over her head, so he comfortably sat back in his seat and folded his hands across his chest.

"You really wanna know?"

In response, Bijou pushed away her curiosity and likewise folded her own hands over her upper body.

"Not really. Anything you have to say is worthless, anyway," she explained as she turned her head. Even the plain blue sky was most likely more important than what the boy beside her had to offer.

At this, the man frowned. It reminded him of a conversation they had while they were trapped in the cave-ins a couple of weeks ago. She was supposed to be interested in what he had to say!

"Well I'll tell you anyway," Hamtaro said proudly. Bijou's shoulders shrugged, a sign of how valuable she thought his words to be.

"What if we tell everyone that we eloped; that it was all done on purpose?" he suggested, his breath slightly held in anticipation as

he watched Bijou turn to face him.

The European Ham-Human blinked a couple of times. Her face twisted in a confused scowl.

"Like I said, they would know it was fake after we get our annulment," she reminded. She was clearly annoyed with how lax and forgetful he was becoming over such an important fact.

"And what if we don't get an annulment?" Hamtaro asked whimsically, giving her the biggest smile he could come up with.

Bijou's mouth first formed an O. When she realized just what the orange-and-white-haired man had said, her face turned red.

Hamtaro's eyes were closed from smiling so wide, so he did not see the slap he got in response to his statement.

"_What the_—" Hamtaro was nearly bent over in pain. Why did she hit so hard?

"I am not spending the rest of my life with you; you should know that by now," Bijou exclaimed indignantly as she angrily crossed her hands against her chest.

"Did I ever suggest spending the rest of our lives together, you prissy brat?" Hamtaro asked as he sat back up. Before Bijou could respond, he continued. "What I meant was, what if we actually lived together for a few months. Your second cousin was married for four months, right? Well if you stayed married longer than that, but still get a divorce, maybe you won't get the same treatment she did."

As much as Bijou wanted to hit Hamtaro again for continually suggesting this ridiculous idea, she could not find herself able to retort.

What Hamtaro was saying—"and perhaps this was the scariest part"—was actually making a little sense. Her cousin had been married four months and had then gotten a divorce. If she could make her marriage last longer, then surely she would get off a little bit easier. (She felt bad, knowing that her cousin would ultimately be looked down upon again—Perhaps when she took over Ribon Jewelers she would try her best to do some damage control for her second cousin's sake.)

But the whole idea nevertheless seemed so incredibly unorthodox. It would have to be a real commitment, letting her family believe that she married out of love rather than a mistake. Her mother most likely would never buy that story; she was much too brilliant for that. That put a damper on the entire plan. Bijou did not care half as much about the rest of her family's opinions as she did about her mother's. If her mother knew how she really got married, then trying to fool everyone else would be a completely futile effort.

"It's not gonna happen," she said flatly, resisting the urge to sigh.

"It'd only have to be for a few months," Hamtaro reminded. "We could probably just get a divorce when we graduate from

university."

"That's six-and-a-half months away," Bijou thought aloud. A thought hit her.

"Why are you pressing this matter so much, anyway?" Her head tilted to the side, trying to analyze him and figure out exactly what he was playing at. For a boy who claimed in sophomore year of high school that being married to a banshee would have been more enjoyable than a life with her, he was being a little insistent.

Hamtaro shrugged.

"You don't think my family's gonna let me live this down? They're probably not as strict as your mom, but they won't let something this big slide. I have just as much at stake as you do."

Bijou bit her lip. "But you're not French—and if I remain married to you long enough to get a divorce rather than an annulment, you'd have to be written into the will—there'd be so much legal paperwork to go through!"

Once again, the man shrugged. "If we're already married, I doubt nationality will play a big role. Plus we can get a pre-nup."

"Then my family would be incredibly suspicious," Bijou explained as she shook her head.

"You can tell them you're just being cautious," Hamtaro reminded. "You're telling me no one from a family as well-off as yours has ever done that?"

The French girl bit her lip harder. "Our friends. Sandy and Pashmina and Crystal and everyone else—they'd have to keep quiet."

At this, Hamtaro had to think. Boss and Oxnard would be easy enough to trust. Stan, on the other hand, liked to reveal secrets; he couldn't keep much within him for long. Though that could be fixed easily enough. He and Bijou would just have to make sure they didn't tell a lot of people, that's all.

"Well, I _guess_ it could work—" Bijou said tentatively as she put her hand up to her white hair, a gesture that was supposed to help her think more clearly. Suddenly, her eyes shifted back to her coworker. "But we have to end it by graduation."

"That works perfectly for me," Hamtaro said as he leaned back casually in his chair.

Bijou lowered her hands as she thought of the perfectly serene man. Why did he always get to be so calm?

"We're not finished," she said as she hit his upper arm. Hamtaro made an almost hissing-like sound as he opened his eyes.

"Why do you keep hitting me today?!" he whined as he sat up straighter. "There are classes for people like you, you know."

"If we're gonna live together, there are some ground rules to cover," Bijou explained as her eyes narrowed.

"Don't worry, I have no intention of borrowing your clothes without asking," the boy joked. This latest comment earned him another stern look from his wife before she continued.

"A) I am not a slave. You make a mess, you clean it up, got it? I also don't cook, either."

Hamtaro laughed. "Relax! I've heard about what happened when you tried to cook on New Year's a couple of years ago. Man you suck in a kitchen!"

"That's beside the point," the girl added cheekily. "B) We do not sleep together, _ever_, but I'm sure you already know that."

"Obviously," the man responded as he rolled his eyes.

"C) We end this when we graduate, not a second longer, got it? Six-and-a-half months from now, I refuse to be called 'Bijou Haruna'."

"Trust me: it's an insult to my surname," Hamtaro replied. Bijou forced herself not to stick her tongue out at him, so she looked away.

"I guess we're really doing thisâ€|"

Had she really just bargained the next few months of her life in a few, short minutes?

Needless to say, Hamtaro was shocked as well. He wasn't expecting her to ever agree, but he had to admit, some stressâ€"even if a minor amountâ€"was taken off him by this new plan.

However, another thought occurred to himâ€|

He surely wasn't going to keep his wife in the same apartment he currently shared with Boss, Stan and Oxnard. He groaned at what he had to do nextâ€|

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It was a good thing Hamtaro was rolling her suitcase for her; Bijou was so nervous at the prospect of breaking the news to Sandy and Pashmina that she was wringing the life out of her hands.

At least three times since she and Hamtaro made their "Plan", as she so fittingly dubbed in her mind, she had asked the man if they should reconsider. In response, he continually told her that it was up to her if she wanted to go through with it, and at that, Bijou would remain silent.

Maybe while she drove home, she could think of some sort of alternate solutionâ€|?

But now, as they walked towards the main doors of the airport, neither of them had any idea that they did not have any more time to

think.

They were making their ways through the white, well-lit airport terminal when a voice called out.

"Hamtaro!"

Hamtaro and Bijou both stopped short and confusedly looked in the direction of the voice.

Standing there was a large group of people, some holding bouquets; about half of them had a familiar orange tint to their hair while some of the others had cream-colored locks. They were all smiling. Beside her, she could practically feel the embarrassment (or was it fear?) emanating from her coworker.

It was like looking at Hamtaro, sorta, but over and over again, Bijou thought to herself. She wasn't sure which person called out his name, but they were obviously related to him.

"Uhh Hamtaro-"

Hamtaro cut her off by giving her a direct look. She couldn't remember seeing his eyes show such a strange emotion.

"Bijou, those are your in-laws."

The French girl let out an audible gasp as nervousness ran through her entire being. _Cats! This wasn't supposed to happen _now.

But before Bijou any words could leave Bijou's now-dry mouth, another voice spoke up.

"Bijou."

Turning to look behind them, the new couple saw a white-haired woman dressed in a designer coat step out from amongst a group of people.

Bijou could now only feel fear as gray eyes pierced into her, silently asking what idiocy the girl had gotten herself into.

She was nearly shaking as she said,

"Hamtaro, that's _yours_."

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I'd like to think this chapter moved the plot significantly.

I'd also like to point out that college is ridiculous and refuses to give me a break. If I'm not studying, I'm taking a test. It took me

like a week to write this chapter whereas I'd normally write it in a day or less.

And man, you guys are picky! The last chapter was about two pages shorter than the average chapter, but that was enough to get most of you asking why it was so short. I guess it means you guys care!

****ChargingForwardBlind-****It was more like a fourteen chapter prologue, in reality, not thirteen! And thinking back, I'm not even sure if I should call it a prologue since there's still another part of the fic to go that I haven't even discussed at all yet! I'm worried that no one will be interested by the time "Petals" is done, but I guess I just have to take it a chapter at a time, don't I? Thanks for reviewing!

****CrystalGurl101-****I wouldn't be sure about Bijou "coming around". Notice how the French girl who worked in the chapel "_naively_" thought the same thing in this chapter. There's a reason "Petals" wasn't the typical story. But thanks for the encouragement and being such a supportive reader!

****Lawliet's Angel-****I loved Full House. I find myself watching the reruns whenever they're on. They bring back such good memories. I'm glad you liked the deleted scene, and thanks for reviewing!

****LylHamgirl168-****Wowâ€|I don't think I've seen you use that entire username in a few years! That brings back memories, too! I hope this chapter was everything you expected and thanks for reviewing!

****Macarov-****"Petals" is indeed only just beginning. Which means I need to pump out these chapters faster since it will be, in my opinion, a significantly long story. I hope you'll enjoy it all the way through! Thanks for the review!

****Shadow Bijou-****I'm so glad I fixed your disappointment from the last chapter! That was such a relief, so thank you for that. I'm glad you picked up on all the petals I mentioned throughout the story (since I don't think anyone as of yet has). It wasâ€|difficult, to say the least, to show Bijou's drunkenness advancing. It took me a good few minutes to figure out what to have her say, but thankfully, that worked out alright. I have no idea if champagne depends on the yearâ€|maybe it is just wine that does that? Either way, we're gonna go with the previous chapter. "Zut alors"â€|hmmm, well "Zut" means something along the lines of mercy/shoot/darn. I generally have Bijou say it when she wants to say something along those lines. "Alors" simply adds emphasis to the statement. As for the twist and what it means for Hamtaro and Bijou's development: I think it's safe to say that Hamtaro is in the beginnings of a crush for the girl, but I can't say whether or not Bijou will ever return those feelings, or if Hamtaro's feelings for the girl will actually develop more. She might even fall in love with someone else. Who knows? I originally cut out the deleted scene because it added some unnecessary tension, and I originally thought that it was better left untouched. But when you mentioned the extra time they got could possibly lead to some "Jacuzzi scene", I had to include it. I'm glad you liked it since it was posted for you! I can't say how long "Petals" will be since I don't know the exact number yetâ€|but it's long. We're still only in

the first of two parts. My biggest fear is that most readers lose interest before the story is done, therefore, I realize I need to get these chapters out faster. But thank you for your review! I'm not sure how much analyzing you can do this chapter, though, since everything is pretty clear-cut. Oh well!€|

****Wishbone the Lover of Books-***Yes, unfortunately the "big twist" was them getting married. I know it was a bit disappointing, but hopefully, you'll enjoy the actual story of "Petals"! Thank you for reviewing!

****French Corner!!!****

Parles-tu francaises means You (informal) speak French?

Bien sur means Of course (or agreement of that sort).

D'accord means Ok

Sacre-bleu means something along the lines of Holy cow (the actual definition is a little risquÃ©, but it is Holy Blue [blood of Jesus])

The rest of what Bijou screams probably should be left untranslated!

Please read and review,

(and of course, enjoy your Thanksgiving/Black Friday shopping!)

-CN

16. The Chaos Theory

So sorry for the lack of updates recently! To be honest, finals had me incredibly stressed, so I took a couple of weeks to myself to relax and try to gain a sense of normalcy, you know?

And I don't say this enough, but thank you all for staying loyal to this fic. I've been thinking of ways to alter this story over the past few days€|of course, these changes won't be seen for another few chapters. But I need to keep updating this fic as quickly as possible, and I'll tell you the reason why in a few chapters' time.

And!€|you must forgive me, but there's a ton of Josie (Bijou's mother) speaking in this chapter, and I tried my best with her accent.

****CN****

****Petals****

****Chapter Sixteen: **_The Chaos Theory_**

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Chaos Theory

The theory that some systems are ultimately unpredictable because of the effects of small scale events that can't be included in the prediction equations. Also, the behavior of certain dynamic systems " that is, systems whose state evolves with time " that may exhibit gradients that are highly sensitive to even the slightest changes.

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Two Ham-Humans looked around the crowded airport terminal. At the moment, there were probably a few hundred people scattered amongst the brightly-lit lobby. There was noise of heavy suitcase wheels being dragged against the tiled floor and cries of long-awaited reunions from every area of the building. For most, it was an incredibly difficult place to concentrate due to the clamor all around them.

But for Haruna Hamtaro and Bijou, the silence in the lose-lose triangle they stood in was deafening.

Hamtaro was well-aware that his new mother-in-law stood just a few feet away, looking with an unreadable expression across her tight face at her daughter. However, he made it a point to not look at her. This was for a few reasons: A) The woman scared the heeby-jeebies out of him (she was, after all, the more stern and legendarily merciless Carbon-Copy of his new wife). And B) Because his own family was standing not too far away from him, and his attention seemed to be more attracted to them.

Bijou could feel her nails piercing into the soft flesh of her hands as she wrung the life out of them. She had long forgotten about her in-laws; compared to the dragon looming over her, anything Hamtaro's family had to say seemed almost trivial. Her mother, whom some people called the most beautiful girl to ever enter into the Ribon family, had on an expression that most people would not be able to decipher. However, Bijou knew all too well what it meant when Josie Ribon kept her emotions hidden. Ever though she was an incredibly composed woman to begin with, it was obvious to her daughter that she was fighting to keep her appearance steady: her lips were too tightly-pursed together and she, like her daughter, had both of her hands folded across her stomach, resisting the urge to wring them out in sheer frustration.

Hamtaro's face didn't turn, but his eyes shifted down to the white-haired girl standing beside him.

"Should we?" He wasn't quite sure what to suggest. They had to make a move sooner or later. A group of people standing idly in an airport was never a good sign.

"Let's talk to your family first," Bijou responded, not looking away from her mother.

They needed to save all their strength for later when they finally spoke to Bijou's mother. Josie knew this well, so as she watched her daughter and her new son-in-law "it was strange just thinking about it" walk over to his family, she couldn't help but feel the smallest sense of satisfaction.

This was truly embarrassing. The moment her eyes left her mother's form, Bijou instinctively moved behind Hamtaro. She was supposed to be a woman of grace and respect, darn it, so how could she face the family of the man she just got married to while there was more alcohol in her system than blood?! The man, in response, couldn't hide the annoyance on his face, but he had to do his best as the pair walked over (more like Hamtaro walked over and Bijou followed his shadow) to the group of Ham-Humans standing in front of them.

"Mom, Dad," she heard her husband say with a slightly tense voice, "This is" Bijou.

He moved aside without warning, leaving an incredibly startled, white-haired girl exposed.

Bijou shrugged her shoulders upward, looking at the people standing before her. Some of them had orange hair, and some of them had brown hair. Some of them had a light, creamish tint to their hair, and some of their hair was blond. Now which ones were his mom and dad?!!

She opened her mouth, but all that came out was an unintelligent croaking sound.

"Hi," she managed, subconsciously stepping backwards. Suddenly, a hand was against her back, preventing her from inching away. She looked to her side and saw Hamtaro, not looking at her, but forcing a smile for his family.

Right, she remembered. His stupid plan to tell everyone this marriage was legit. They were in this together, and he wasn't letting her back out so easily.

"Oh, she's even lovelier in person, Hamtaro," a gentle voice said from somewhere in the crowd. Bijou looked at Hamtaro's family and saw a woman step out. It only took a few seconds to recognize who she was. She had such pale, creamy hair that it could almost be confused as white. It fell in waves in a low pony-tail down to her mid back. She had two, rich cobalt eyes that she shared with her son.

"Welcome to our family!" She smiled softly at Bijou, and in response, the French girl was left in awe. Such a sweet, beautiful woman was that idiot's mother?

"She's quite the catch, son," another voice said, this time a male. A Ham-Human with orange hair stepped forward and shook Bijou's hand, surprising the girl who was still looking at Hamtaro's mother.

"Thanks, dad," Hamtaro mumbled, blushing and looking to the side.

"We're honored to have you," the man continued as he let go of Bijou. "Though, a little heads up about the elopement would've been nice."

As Josie suppressed a laugh, Bijou's eyes widened, staring straight at her new father-in-law with her mouth slightly open. "They don't know how we got marriedâ€|? Are they serious?_"

"Then it's not called 'eloping', dad," Hamtaro quickly quipped. It wasn't hard to pick up the happiness in his voice now that he knew his plan was just one step closer to coming to fruition. Even though it was only for a brief moment, things seemed stable and not as hectic as they had been all morning. Bijou took this opportunity to study the rest of the family that had come.

There were about four, young-adult Ham-Humans there aside from Hamtaro's parents. Three of them were girls and one of them was a guy. There was also a little girlâ€"most likely around the age of fiveâ€"standing at one of the women's side. Bijou assumed the little girl was the women's mother, and the man was her father.

Bijou knew for a fact that Hamtaro didn't have any siblings, so were these people his cousins? She knew he was close to them, after all.

Suddenly, the little girl stepped to the front of the crowd. Bijou looked down at the child, noticing her vivid blue eyes and dark, orange hair. She was looking determinedly at the European Ham-Human, almost like she was having a stare down with her.

"That's Aoko," Hamtaro whispered to her. "She's my cousin's daughter, but I treat her like a niece." Bijou nodded as she took in this information.

"Hello, Aoko," Bijou said tentatively. She seemed to be doing well with the rest of the family, and she hoped this girl wouldn't be an exception.

However, as Aoko finished taking a good, long look at Bijou, she turned her head away, seeming disgusted.

"She's too big to live in a cat's toe!" Aoko said indignantly as she folded her hands across her tiny frame.

"Umm, yesâ€|most people are," Bijou replied, totally lost. She looked at Hamtaro, but he shrugged, also unaware of what the girl was talking about.

"My mommy said you lived in a cat's toe!" the girl explained, turning around to face Bijou. "But that's impossible because you're so tall!"

"No, sweetie! I said _chateau_, " one of Hamtaro's cousins explained, moving to the front of the crowd to join the girl. She was the one Bijou had pegged as the girl's mother, so it gave her a small satisfaction to see that she was right.

"What's that?" Aoko asked, looking at her mother. But Bijou was the one who answered.

"It's basically a really, really big house. I _do_ live in oneâ€¦in France," she explained, blushing slightly. Speaking of her family's wealth was always something she became flustered over.

"Can I see it?" the girl asked as her eyes turned to Bijou.

"_Bien_â€¦umm, of course! If you come to France," Bijou replied as she smiled at the child. The girl, in response, looked elated and started pestering her mother about when they would be able to go to France.

Hamtaro let out a sigh of relief. Bijou didn't completely embarrass herself or him. His parents seemed to like her, and the hard-to-please Aoko seemed satisfied as well. Life was good.

"_Excusez-moi_," Josie Ribon said as she came up to the Harunas.

Then, just as Hamtaro and Bijou felt a bit of calm, it was all swept away as they heard the Ribon woman speak.

"Forgive us," Hamtaro's mother explained, eliminating the small distance between her and the CEO. She bowed in respect as she said, "Your daughter seems wonderful, and I hope my son will please you just the same."

"Muzzerâ€¦" Bijou said to herself, her accent returning, as she put a nervous hand over her mouth. She had temporarily forgotten about her presence, and now it all came back like a slap in the face.

"You zon't 'ave to zoo zat," Josie said, causing the bowing woman to rise. Josie's eyes looked bored, not reflecting any sort of the emotion that Hamtaro's family was showing. If Bijou wasn't so frightened, she'd very possibly be embarrassed.

"These are for you," Hamtaro's mother said, ushering for one of Hamtaro's cousins to step forward and hand Josie a bouquet, albeit nervously. Josie took the flowers politely and glanced them over.

"They're beautiful," the French matriarch replied, nodding in acknowledgment to the Haruna woman.

Hamtaro's mother seemed to quickly pick up that these one of the few compliments she would ever receive from the white-haired lady, so she smiled as brightly as she could and said a very grateful, "Thank you."

"Mhmmâ€¦eef you wouldn't mind, I'd like to speak to Bijouâ€¦and 'amtaro," Josie explained, her eyes resting on her new son. Hamtaro felt himself shiver, looking back at the gray eyes, but he had to make sure he won this woman over. His plan had to work, darn it!

"Of course not." This time, it was Hamtaro's father who was speaking. "We have dinner reservations, so we'd be more than happy if you could join usâ€¦" The man stopped speaking once he realized Josie was shaking her head.

"_DÃ©solÃ©e_, but I'm sure you found out about zhisâ€¦_situation_ as quickly as I zid, and I 'ad to make many changes in my very busy schedule to come 'ere," she clarified. "I'd like to see zhem in my office to go over a few zhings."

"Of course you can speak with us," Hamtaro agreed. "We'll follow you in our cars." Bijou shook her head to herself, knowing her mother's answer.

"Zat eez not neceezary." Though she was answering Hamtaro, her eyes were now settled upon her daughter's distraught expression. She hadn't said anything of significance yet. Good. She finally knew how Josie liked to discuss important things in private. At least she was good for something."

"You can come wiz me in zee limo."

Josie turned around with both grace and speed, making an attractive clicking sound against the shiny floor as she walked to the main exit.

Bijou quickly followed her mother's example, and she looked back at Hamtaro once she realized he wasn't following. Was he insane? His mother just made an order!

"Come on," she mouthed frantically as she gestured for him to catch up. Hamtaro turned to look at his incredibly-confused family and shrugged before he readjusted his bag's strap around his shoulder and wheeled Bijou's suitcase behind him and out of the airport.

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Throughout the car ride, Hamtaro couldn't shake off this feeling of shivering, though he refused to attribute it to Josie's presence. It was sort of ridiculous, really. How could one woman affect someone that much? Luckily, Josie didn't speak during the ride. She simply sat back and observed the newlyweds intently. Perhaps that was worse, in retrospect, now that Hamtaro thought about it.

Bijou, though she definitely looked uncomfortable, didn't look as if anything was different. Hamtaro had to remember, this girl became an entirely different person in front of her mother. Her normally sharp tongue dulled down to oblivion and instead of speaking with confidence, she spoke as if she were a nervous cook watching a queen try her food for the first time (and if the queen didn't like the food, it would be off with the cook's head).

These were the thought that occupied Hamtaro's mind as they walked through the ornate and breath-taking halls of Ribon Jewelers.

Even as they stood in the elevator, Josie Ribon refused to say anything. She stood with her back to the two Ham-Humans behind her, well-aware of their mounting nervousness. _Good._ As if they could honestly get away with such stupidity and not be held responsible! Ha! She watched idly as the numbers on the elevator's electronic screen increased one-by-one until, eventuallyâ€¦

"'ere eez our stop." They were the first words she had spoken since they had left the airport. Without waiting for a reply from either of the young adults, she left the elevator and entered the hallway.

Bijou followed like a loyal puppy, and Hamtaro had no choice but to mimic the girl's action. They walked through two sets of glass doors, each with the Ribon insignia etched beautifully into them. They also walked passed Josie's secretary, who stood as soon as the woman enteredâ€"she looked as though she had something important to sayâ€", but with one dismissive gesture from Josie, sat right back down.

Hamtaro and Bijou finally entered the onyx-adorned office. Without ever glancing back at them, Josie moved around her desk. She never sat down in her massive executive chair. Rather, she placed her palms directly on the smooth surface of her desk and looked at the two Ham-Humans before her.

They stood at either of the chairs on the other side of the CEO's desk, waiting observantly for some sort of command on what to do next.

"Zoo you," she finally started, looking straight at Hamtaro. "'ave any sort of nobility een your blood? Royalty?" when Hamtaro didn't answer, but rather stare at her with a confused expression, she continued.

"Eez anyone een your family a leader of an _eenternational_ buzeeness? A world-renown _politician_? A _diplomat_? A _governor_? A _mayor_?" Again, no answer.

"A _student council leader_?" No answer. Josie laughed to herself, a sad, almost pitiful laugh.

"_Ohhâ€|Je le savais!_ I knew itâ€|I _knew_ it," she said with a sigh as she looked to her daughter, who gulped in response.

"Bijou," the woman continued, "eez related to zhee French areeztocracy on 'er maternal side. On 'er fazzer's side, she eez zhee 'eir to a multi-billeon zollar jewelry empire. What makez _you_ worzhee of 'er 'and?"

Hamtaro knew Bijou was rich, but Josie had said billion, right? As in, with a 'B'? And since when was the brat related to aristocrats? He had thought the source of all her wealth was her father's companyâ€|but it made sense: Why would Bijou's father, an already rich man, marry Bijou's mother unless Bijou's mother came from some money of her own? It was the best way to ensure a marriage that wasn't purely based on greed.

Still, he had to answer Josie's question. What made him worthy of Bijou's hand? Well, what said he wanted it in the first place? But he couldn't tell Josie that.

"Ummâ€|I love her?" Hamtaro felt like slapping himself. The way he said it, he was more like asking Josie if his answer worked rather than stating it confidently. Yet, as he glanced over to his wife, she stood with her head lowered, waiting for her mother's punishment. She

wasn't a kid, Hamtaro thought. Why did she let her mother affect her so much?

For that very reason, Hamtaro looked back at Josie with all the confidence he could muster. "That's why I married her, after all."

But that confidence was knocked out of them with one, silencing gesture from Josie. She had her eyes closed and brought a frustrated hand to massage one of her temples, something Hamtaro had seen Bijou do several times (mostly because of him).

"You don't expect me to believe that, do you?" she opened her slate gray eyes and stared at Bijou as she finished this sentence.

Bijou didn't look up. Just as she was about to break down and admit to Josie that everything was all a stupid mistake, she was stopped right in her tracks.

"And why wouldn't you?" Hamtaro asked, his voice rising ever-so-slightly. Josie looked at her new son-in-law and resisted rolling her eyes.

Bijou felt herself tense; why couldn't Hamtaro just own up to their mistake? It probably was the most mature thing to do, anyway. Well, if his plan to make everyone believe them actually worked, then good for him. But if it completely backfired in his face, well, he probably got too ahead of himself.

"Andre would have been so very perfect for you, Bijou," Josie explained, once again looking at her daughter. "But you broke your engagement to him."

"I didn't love him." It was the most truthful thing she had said to her mother all day. She looked up at her mother wearily, but her mother angrily hit her desk in response.

"And _this_ is love?!" she gestured angrily at the two of them.

Bijou's eyes widened in a sudden sense of primal fear. Her mother's face was turning red, and that was a fatal sign. Josie only let her feelings be evident once she was truly traumatized. It had only ever happened one other time, if Bijou remembered correctly.

"_I'm sorry_," Bijou said, in French, with her head lowered. She knew her marriage would undoubtedly shock her mother, but seeing her like this made the guilty hole in her heart enlarge five-fold. She knew she would regret her next move for the rest of her life, but perhaps for her mother's sake and the reputation of this family, _this_ was the best thing she could do.

"_You should be_," Josie responded, her eyes lowered to slits as she looked at her daughter. "_The embarrassment you've brought on to this family is going to require an unimaginable amount of damage control. I hope you're satisfied. Now we have to go through a ridiculous amount of paperwork for annulment, or maybe even a divorce_"

o.O Hamtaro watched as the two conversed, unable to decipher a single word of what they were saying, and this only made him more nervous. Bijou could, at this very moment, throw away the entire plan. Then what?

"_No, mother,_" Bijou took a deep breath as she felt her fists clench at her sides. "_I am sorry you weren't informed of the wedding, but I do honestly love him, and we're going to stay married_."

Josie looked as though she had been slapped in the face, which, in a way, she was. Her eyes were visibly shaking with frustrated tears. As Bijou looked at her mother, she felt her heart breaking all over again, even more so than when she had first seen that horrible DVD this morning.

"Why," Josie started, looking at her daughter as if she had never seen her before, "zoo you eenzist to keep up zhis lie?"

Hamtaro looked proudly at his wife, even though she refused to look at him and had tears running down her face. This must have been hard for her; she normally molded to whatever her mother saw best, and the few times she had ever defied her mother, Hamtaro had heard, had been some of the most difficult times of her life.

Josie never got her answer. Before either her daughter or son-in-law could reply, her secretary ran into the office.

Josie looked lividly at the young woman, who looked as if she had just been thrown into a cage full of angry lions.

"I zid not want to be deezturbed," Josie reminded. The secretary, in response, nodded meekly. She knew she shouldn't have come in here, but the fact was if this deal fell apart, Josie would fire her on the spot, and she really needed this job.

"I-I know, Ribon-san, b-b-but the representatives from the Arabs h-hh-ave been waiting for over four hours, and ev-every time they c-call, they sound like they're going to b-break the merger," she explained. The young woman's shoulders curled inwards, as if she were about to be hit.

Josie's already pale hands lost even more color as they balled into fists. She let out an exasperated breath, much like a dragon releasing a puff of smoke, as she looked angrily at the couple before her.

"Monday," she said, her voice staying calm with years of etiquette guiding her, "We will 'ave lunch. I'll call you wiz zhee detailz, Bijou."

"But we have school-" Hamtaro thought he was making a valid point, but Bijou once again shook her head, and Josie looked crossly at the man.

"You zon't 'ave schoolâ€"or workâ€"unteel zhis entire orzeal eez cleared up," she explained tersely.

"But-" How could he not go to school, or his job? Those were the two most important factors in his life at the moment. Ohâ€"wait, that position was now occupied with his wife, wasn't it?

"Bijou, zhee limo will take you back 'ome," Josie said, completely cutting Hamtaro off.

Bijou nodded eagerly, still desiring to please her mother as much as possible despite their current situation.

"I guess I'll call a cab," Hamtaro said to himself. He finally realized why Josie made him take his bagâ€"and not Bijou'sâ€"out of the limo in the first place and drop it off in the building's main lobby. Hopefully, it was still there.

As Josie dismissed the two of them from her office, Bijou walked a good five steps in front of Hamtaro, even after he called after her to wait up. She was angry with herself, and there was no denying that. However, for coming up with this ridiculous plan without thinking it fully through, she seemed furious with him. This, more than anything, felt stranger and more unwelcomed to him than anything else that had happened to him today.

Hamtaro stopped in the hallway, letting Bijou walk into the elevator. She needed her space, so he supposed he would just take the next one.

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Bijou closed her compact mirror and quickly stuffed it back into her purse. With a few touch-ups, her face had finally lost the red color it attained whenever she got very upset. She didn't want her friends to see her like this, after all. She looked up at the front door of her small house; she had been standing on its stoop for well over ten minutes, doing her best to compose herself and get rid of all signs of uneasiness.

It seemed like eons ago that she left for her business trip, when she had read the note Pashmina and Sandy had left for her. Her life seemed complicated then. She smiled to herself. Even though it was just a few days ago, her past life's problems seemed childish now.

She took a deep breath and inserted her key into her front door. She walked up the few stairs that led to her main floor, her luggage rolling on the hardwood floor behind her.

Bijou smiled as she saw the back of Pashmina's head, happily watching TV on the couch. The girl turned around after a few seconds, feeling the breeze that came in whenever the front door opened.

"Bij!" Pashmina cried, a large smiling growing on her face. She practically jumped over the couch as she ran to the girl and embraced her in a tight hug. Bijou took in the familiar scent of her friend and returned the hug, smiling sadly because she knew her life as one of the roommates would end shortly, if everything went according to plan.

"I missed you," Pashmina continued, still holding the girl. She lifted her head a bit and looked down the hallway to where the bedrooms were. "Sandy! Bijou's home!" she yelled.

"Seriously?" Sandy asked as she poked her head out of the bathroom, a toothbrush in her mouth and her hair looking slightly unkempt. Had she really just woken up, Bijou wondered. It was close to dinner time.

Once the girl saw Bijou in the living room, she giddily ran over and grabbed Bijou.

While Sandy and Bijou enjoyed their reunions, Pashmina tapped her chin in thought.

"Bij," the girl said, her stunning turquoise eyes rolling upwards as she considered something, "we checked online, and your flight was on time. You should've been home a few hours ago."

As Bijou and Sandy let go of each other, Bijou looked down to the side, something that neither Sandy nor Pashmina noticed.

"Yeah, we were worried for a little bit, but we figured traffic was bad, right Bij?" Sandy asked, smiling at her French friend.

"Umm, not exactly. Listen," Bijou started to say. The nervousness in her voice had startled Sandy and Pashmina, who were now catching on that something was wrong.

"Something happened in Kyoto," Bijou said, her hands once again being wrought ferociously.

"Somethingâ€¦like what?" Pashmina asked as she put her hands on Bijou's shoulders. "Are you alright?"

Bijou shook her head. "Noâ€¦" I mean, _yes_, I'm physically fineâ€¦I suppose."

"Then like, what happened?" Sandy questioned, every worst case scenario running through her mind. "Was it the convention? Did you get fired or something?"

Bijou shook her head again. She gently lifted Pashmina's hands off her shoulders and sighed. Telling Pashmina and Sandy seemed almost as difficult as facing her mother, but it was a completely different feeling of disconnection now.

"While we were in Kyoto, Hamtaro and I-

"Hamtaro?" Sandy asked, pulling the toothbrush out of her mouth and taking a good, long look at Bijou. She gasped as she came to a realization.

"Bij, don't tell meâ€¦you're _pregnant_?" her brilliant, lime-green eyes were shaking with honest fear.

Bijou rolled her eyes. Truly, it was almost comical how seriously Sandy had asked.

"_No_, I am not pregnant," the heiress clarified.

"Is there any chance you might be?" Sandy was quick with her follow-up.

Before Bijou could scream a very defiant "NO", Pashmina broke the tension in the room with a laugh. A sweet, rich sound that caused tears in her eyes. Sandy and Bijou could only look at the girl confusedly as her laughter's melody carried through the halls.

"Sandy, _come on_, " Pashmina said as she wiped her eyes, "This is Bijou we're talking about. Bi. Jou. What's the worst she could've done? Ordered regular coffee instead of decaf? Honestly," she looked at Bijou as a smile graced her lovely face, "Bij, you're about as dark as sugar. Anything you consider to be that bad is probably completely insignificant to anybody else."

Sandy took a moment to take in Pashmina's words, but she eventually smiled.

"You're right, Pashy," she agreed, placing her toothbrush back into her mouth. "Bijou Ribon has like a do-no-wrong view of life."

The two looked over at Bijou, amusedly waiting her explanation for what was really so bad that Bijou had become this worked up.

Bijou felt a little indignant. Is this really how they viewed her? _As dark as sugar_? She wasn't that badâ€"or good, whatever!

So, it was almost with a smile on her face that Bijou looked at her two roommates.

"Actually, it's Bijou Haruna now."

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Hamtaro squirted some mustard onto his sandwich. He decided he needed more ketchup as he put the mustard away. So, it was while he rummaged through his kitchen cabinets for the red condiment that he said, "Hey guys, guess what?"

"Guys" was referring to Boss and Oxnard, who were currently playing a video game, and Stan, sitting on the couch and brushing his teeth as he watched the game unfold on the screen (since he was so competitive, he was not allowed to play).

"What?" Stan said absentmindedly, not paying close attention at all to his orange-and-white-haired friend as he kept his eyes glued to the screen.

"I did something in Kyoto," Hamtaro explained as he found the ketchup in the back of the cabinet. Success! Hamtaro the Super Sleuth still had it!

"What'd you do, kid?" Boss asked. Like Stan, he had a small interest in what Hamtaro was saying, but his attention was far more preoccupied with the game.

"Aww, come on, Boss! That move had to be illegal," Oxnard whined when he realized just how badly Boss was beating him.

"All's fair when you're racing cars, Oxy," Stan reminded, lazily brushing his teeth as he said so.

"You guys have to guess," Hamtaro explained as he put a few slices of white cheese onto his masterpiece.

Stan made an incomprehensible groaning sound with his mouth, an indication that he was in no mood to play games.

"Just tell usâ€"Oxnard! You almost had him! How could you lose when you had such an amazing opportunity to one-up him??!!!!!" Stan was, at this point, jumping on the couch and pointing his toothbrush viciously at the TV.

"Stop yelling at me, Stan!"

"Soâ€|you don't wanna guess? You just want me to tell you?" Hamtaro asked as he folded the two halves of his sub together. He walked around his kitchen counter and observed his friends. He got hungry, so he took a bite of his sandwich.

When they didn't respond, Hamtaro continued to chew his meal. He supposed he could wait; it wasn't like he had to worry about frivolous things like school and work anymore, after all.

"I got married." He said it as he swallowed. Hmmâ€|it could've used more lettuce.

Stan looked back at his friend with a sly smile on his face.

"Yeah? To who?" He turned his head back around and cried once again when he realized Oxnard just kept missing the perfect chances to get in the lead.

"Who else?" Hamtaro asked as he leaned against the kitchen counter casually. "Bijou Ribon."

Suddenly, all the crashing noises from the game halted and three pairs of eyes instantly darted to Hamtaro's form, still happily chewing his food.

"Kid," Boss started, realizing that the man had spent the past three days with Bijou, "you didn't actuallyâ€|right?"

"Sure I did," Hamtaro explained, shrugging. "I have the marriage license in my bag to prove it."

Stan's mouth hung open as his toothbrush fell to the floor. The controller fell right out of Boss's hands as he looked at the boy he often teased about being so clueless with the feminine mystique. Oxnard looked at Hamtaro with a worried expression as he ran a nervous hand through his gray-and-white hair.

"Oh, she's not gonna move in, is she? It'll be way too crowded and she'll probably try to girl-ify everything!"

Hamtaro smirked and took another bite out of his sandwich.

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"How's Sandy doing?"

Maxwell Librius's voice hinted at the slightest bit of worry, though that was to be expected, Bijou realized. The two had been together longer, by a landslide, than any other couple their age that Bijou knew.

She pressed the cool cloth to Sandy's forehead and sighed. She looked at the phone, currently on its speakerphone setting, as she spoke.

"She's still unconscious." Bijou looked over to the other girl lying across the room on the love seat (Sandy was the one occupying the couch). "Pashmina is, too."

"Alright." Bijou heard him release a long-held breath. "Are you sure neither of them hit their heads when they fainted?"

"Relax, Maxwell. I told you that I caught them both, didn't I? There should be any concussions, if that's what you're thinking," Bijou clarified. She winced at the memory of defying the laws of physics and somehow being able to catch both girls before their heads hit the wooden floor of their living room. Granted, she'd probably have to see a chiropractor with how much her shoulders hurtâ€"she had caught Pashmina in a rather awkward position with the fainted girl's head ramming into her upper backâ€"but it was worth it if her best friends were to be alright.

"That's right, but just to be sure, can I stay on the line until they wake up?" Maxwell asked.

"Of course! I called you because I needed your advice on what to do, remember? It's funny, Maxwell, since I thought you were going to Sorbonne to study literature, but you seem more suited for a career in paramedics."

"Ehh, I guess I just read a lot of First Aid books," the boy replied nervously. He was truly too modest for his own good.

"So, are you going to tell me what exactly it was that you told them?" he asked. Bijou sighed again and picked up the phone.

"It's stupid, Maxwell. And someone as smart as you will probably look down on me because of it. It's just so embarrassing," she said timidly as she sat down on her coffee table, shoulders slouching.

"I see. I'm guessing it has to do with your impromptu wedding?"

At this, Bijou immediately straightened her posture, her eyes widening.

"How do you know about that, Maxwell?" Her voice revealed her panicked state of mind, and Maxwell felt like hitting himself for unlocking her Pandora's Box of emotions.

"They sell tabloids outside of the ticket agency I go to to book my flights," Maxwell explained. "When I saw a headline about a French

jewelry heiress getting married in Japan, well, the coincidence piqued my interest."

"_Merd!_" Bijou was going to sue that stupid chapel owner and his daughter for letting such news out.

"Bijou." Although the girl couldn't see it, the boy was blushing by her vulgar outburst.

"Hehâ€|Sorry, Maxwell." She bit her tongue and regained her slouching position. At the very least, not many people believed tabloid stories, anyway. Her family had been in those crummy magazines hundreds of times, and nothing crucial ever became of it.

But then...a thought hit her like a March wind in August.

"Maxwell," the girl started cautiously. She stood up and started pacing the small living room, unaware that behind her, Sandy was waking up from her fainting spell,

"Why were you at the ticket agency?"

"To buy a ticket, obviously." There was something in his voice. Amusement? Was he hiding something?

"Are you coming home for winter break early?" Bijou asked, astonished.

"Noâ€|"

"Then why-"

"â€|I'm coming home for good."

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Seventeen months, two weeks, four days.

That's how long Sparkle had been touring. Every day, the number seemed to grow, and simultaneously, her anger and bitterness grew with it.

She supposed she was lucky. At the very least, she got to complete two years of college. That's more than most pop singers, right? Honestly, she didn't even know why she cared so much for schooling to begin with. She went to sleep wondering this question every night, and she woke up answerless day after day.

This was the very same question that haunted her thoughts as she sat in a private waiting area of Verona Catullo Airport in Italy.

Perhaps because Italy was the last stop on her obscenely long tour, and she knew she was heading home after so long with still no answer to her question.

She rolled her eyes. Sparkle knew better than to bother herself with such trivial matters. They just caused wrinkles, anyway. She casually glanced over to the unoccupied seat beside her. Her manager had left a sunflower-and-banana-nut muffin and a bottle of cranberry juice (her usual choice for a snack) on top of some magazines bought from the airport.

She wasn't hungry at the moment, so she pushed the food aside and looked through the various catalogs available. Given the fact that she was at an Italian airport, there wasn't much selection when it came to Japanese reading, so she had to make due.

She skipped over a health and fitness magazine, completely threw away a sports one, and was practically revolted by a car and engine maintenance catalog. She was just about ready to give up on finding something worthwhile to spend her time with (since she couldn't understand what was on the TV and her mp3 player was currently packed in her suitcase [_really_ smart idea on her part]).

However, that's when she found a Japanese tabloid at the very bottom of the pile.

Normally, she would've thrown it away. If _she_ wasn't on the front page, then the rest of the issue was sure to be complete and utter garbage.

But, who _was_ on the front page caught her interest and now, it would not waver.

Jewel Heiress Elopes in Kyoto

Sparkle immediately pulled out her cell phone and checked the time. She had a good half hour before her private jet was prepped for taking off, but now, even that small amount of time seemed unbearable.

She promptly stood up, eyes glaring over everyone in the area.

"See if they can speed this up, people! Time is money," Sparkle called out in the private waiting area.

The people currently in the waiting roomâ€”from her security guards to her parents to her managerâ€”looked up in surprise.

Time is money? But her tour has just endedâ€”what was she in such a hurry for?

Sparkle sat back down, quickly flipping to the article in the tabloid she was looking for. As her eyes moved through the words printed on those pages, a single sentence escaped her professionally-painted lips.

"We have some friends to congratulate."

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I thought I'd finish this chapter with a complete circle: it began in an airport, and ended in one, too.

****Anditends-***First of all, thanks for reviewing! Ahh, I took quite a bit of French in high school, so I like putting it in. But everything I put in is either explanatory through context clues or I explain at the end of the chapter, so I hope it's not too bad. As for Jingle singing at the weddingâ€|well, he is going to be in the story, but I don't think that's the way he'll be introduced. You'll just have to wait and see!

****Crystalgurl101-***Good luck with the college application process! It had me more stressed than finals, I think. I'm glad you took the liberty of translating Bijou's French slander from the last chapter (I certainly didn't want to post the meaning of that stuff in this fic :D). Bijou has quite the potty-mouth, doesn't she? I'm glad you liked the chapter and once again, thanks for reviewing!

****Lawliet's Angel-***You've been patient enough, I think. Soon, depending on how long I make each chapter, Komachi makes her debut. Within the next 2-3, I think. So, thanks for reviewing and I hope you stick around to see what happens to her!

****Shadow Bijou-***On Hamtaro and Bijou actually getting together in the endâ€|yes, maybe I should take off the "Hamijou" part in the summary. Bijou may very well fall for someone else (like, say, her boss who had been paying such close attention to her up until now). But you'll have to wait just like everybody else!!! There are going to be plenty of HamtaroxBijou connecting moments coming up, especially in part 2 of the fic. At the moment, they have to settle their individual lives before coming together and living as one familyâ€|but no, there's going to be lots of those two coming up, so you needn't worry. Hamtaro does have an ulterior motive for his scheme, and when Bijou finds out about it, she'll beâ€|indignant, to say the least. Ahh, and sorry I couldn't respond earlier! I'd love to see your HxB comic! I can't believe I didn't reply to that. :(But I'd really like to see it, please?

****Wishbone the Lover of Books-***Sorry, I know I have spelling and grammar mistakes each chapter, but like I said, I'm just so eager to push chapters out that I rarely ever proof read. My mistake. Hmm, so you were indeed disappointed by the twist. I understand. I wrote the plot almost three years ago, thinking my idea was genius, not realizing how clichÃ© it actually was. But I hope from now on, you continue to stay more interested. That's all I can hope for, my readers' satisfaction. So thank you for reviewing and staying so loyal!

Alright, so that's all for now. I truly hope you all enjoyed this chapter and that it was worth the wait. Thank you, once again, for putting up with me and my random spurts of updating-ness.

Reviews are always welcome.

-CN

(And happy New Year's!!)

17. Autumn Nights are Foreshadowing

I'm so, so, sorry for this really bad habit of updating after a while. I'm gonna shut up now and go straight to the chapter.

****CN****

****Petals****

****Chapter Seventeen:**** _Autumn Nights are Foreshadowing_

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"â€|I'm coming home for good."

Bijou's delicate fingers wrapped around the receiver of the phone tightly, her emerald eyes widening as the news registered.

"Uhâ€|umm, that's _great_ Maxwell, really it is! But it's just so suddenâ€|When did you find out?"

"I had known since last year when I was planning my schedule for the fall semester. Turns out I well over the required amount of credits and the rest of my major's mandatory classes have all been completed. As soon as I finish taking my finals in a few weeks, I'll be done and coming home for forever!"

His voice sounded so happy, Bijou noted. Her eyes suddenly went sad, she wasn't quite sure why. This was the last emotion in the world she should've been feeling right now.

"Ughhâ€|Bij, what _happened_?" Sandy had a hand over her face as she say up on the couch. She felt the taste of toothpaste in her mouth, remembering that she had been brushing her teeth when Bijou came back from her trip. She looked over and saw her toothbrush on the coffee table and a passed-out Pashmina laying across the room on the love seat.

Bijou turned around, and another sinking feeling took over. It swept over her, causing a strange, almost angry look on her face as she handed the phone to the strawberry-blonde.

"It's Maxwell," the French girl explained, holding the phone limply in her hands. "I think there's something he wants to tell you."

Confused, Sandy kept her eyes locked with Bijou's as she accepted the phone. There was suddenly a tension in the room, Sandy noted, heightening her anxiety over what Maxwell possibly had to say.

"Maxy?" Sandy asked, finally looking away from Bijou. She could feel Bijou's stare on her intensify, so that's when she decided to leave the room. She slowly lifted herself off the couch (her body still being a little sluggish from the fainting spell she just had), and made her way into her room.

Bijou continued looking in the direction Sandy left, unable to shake this feeling from herself. She felt soâ€¦bitter, almost, and she couldn't figure out for the life of her what was wrong.

Bijou put a hand on the wall, feeling all the strength leave her as she fell deeper into this negative spiral.

"_WHAT?! YOU'RE COMING HOME FOR GOOD?!!!!!"_

It was the cry heard 'round the world. There was no denying how Sandy was feeling at the momentâ€¦Her scream was practically dripping with happiness, but that only deepened the frown on Bijou's face.

Of course, She realized, shutting her eyes tightly as she put her head against the wall. _This is jealousy_.

It was horrible to feel such things about her best friend, but she couldn't help it. Sandy was so happy Maxwell, and now their happiness just increased ten-fold. She was so incredibly lucky to find a guy like Maxwell: smart, courteous, down-to-earth. He was everything a girl could ask for, and now they could continue their lives _together_ instead of across a continent.

And what did she, the Great Bijou Ribon, have? In her years of being groomed to find a man as wealthy, educated, and socially-gifted as herself, whomever did she choose? Where did her love life culminate? Indeed, what _did_ she have?

A sham of a marriage with a boy she couldn't stand. Some stupid farce that would end in a few months, anyway. When compared to what real love, the kind that she saw in her best friend and Maxwell, was, how could she even try to keep up with such a lie?

"Why did Sandy scream like that?"

Startled, Bijou quickly wiped her face before turning around and seeing a very drowsy Pashmina sitting on the loveseat with her legs curled under her. She rubbed the last bit of sleepiness out of her stunning green eyes before looking back up at Bijou.

"Good news," the white-haired girl explained as she came up to her friend. "_Very_ good news."

Just not any for me.

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"I-" Stan cut himself off, unable to think of what to say next.
"Uhhâ€¦-No, what I'm trying to ask isâ€¦I mean-"

Hamtaro continued to chew on his sandwich as the boys around him continued to scratch their heads, at a total loss of what to say given this incredibly unorthodox situation.

"Kid," Boss started, looking to the side and taking in all that Hamtaro had just told him, "you said her mom found out?"

"Yeah," Hamtaro said, swallowing. "She wasn't pleased about it at all, and I have to meet with her and Bijou soon, but I'm not too stressed about it."

"You don't seem nervous about this at all, buddy," Oxnard noted, giving his long-time best friend a quizzical look.

Hamtaro shrugged as Stan continued to run a hand through his hair in absolute confusion.

"My parents are happy that I found a girl, so they're off my back," he explained. In response, Boss gave Hamtaro a strange look that the orange-and-white-haired boy failed to notice.

"Bijou Ribon!" Stan cried, finally managing to say something (for a second there, Hamtaro thought he was gonna faint). The strawberry blonde male looked as though he were about to pull his hair out of his head.

"You didn't just marry any girl, Hamtaro! This is Bijou Ribon. She's loaded, brilliant and gorgeous! Even if you guys were drunkâ€¦How did you of all people get a girl like that?!"

Ignoring the jab at his dating skills, Hamtaro felt a sting of jealousy as he heard Stan talk about Bijou like that. She wasn't his to compliment.

"You have to stop calling her Bijou Ribon. Her legal name's Haruna now," Hamtaro explained with just a bit more hostility than necessary.

"Or at least it is for the next six months," Boss reminded, a thought going off in his mind. He noticed how Hamtaro seemed to ignore him completely as he said this, looking away and taking another bite out of his sub.

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"Maxwell said he wants to start looking for apartments," Sandy explained at dinner, suddenly causing Bijou to take her fork away from her mouth. Pashmina, however, beamed.

"So you two are moving in together?"

"Yeah! Isn't this exciting?!" Sandy was practically glowing, completely unable to touch her food for she was so wound up (in a good way).

"It is," Pashmina agreed as her eyes softened. It wasn't often Sandy got to see her boyfriend to begin with, so it was so refreshing to see her so happy over this.

"Looking for an apartment won't be necessary," Bijou chimed in, absentmindedly pushing her dinner around her plate with her fork.

It suddenly became incredibly quiet. All eyes fell on the European Ham-Human as she continued looking down at her plate.

Sandy and Pashmina exchanged glances before anything else could be said.

"Bij?" Sandy asked softly yet tentatively. Meanwhile, Pashmina had noted that ever since Maxwell's phone call came, Bijou hadn't said much.

Of course, none of them could forget what Bijou had told them earlier that day: the fact that she was now married to Hamtaro Haruna. Foolishly, however, the three of them chose to momentarily forget about it, pushing it to the back of their minds and acting as if Bijou could push this mistake past her.

The truth was, Bijou had to restrain herself from soiling Sandy's day. She refused to be the rain that would block her sun, despite the inner struggles she was going through. All those struggles—they were based on a nasty feeling—jealousy—anyway, and she was not going to let it get the best of her.

"Maxwell could live here," Bijou said, shrugging slightly as she mixed some tomato sauce into her salad. "There'll be plenty of room, especially when I move out."

The white-haired girl inwardly cringed. There went all her attempts at keeping the mood nice and cheerful—

"When will you be moving in with him, anyway?" Pashmina asked at length, letting the information fall around her.

"And you won't be moving into his current apartment will you? Not with all those guys and _Stan_?" Sandy asked, almost fearful for her friend now.

As Bijou looked up, she couldn't help but wonder: how often would she get to do this anymore? Could she count how many more days she had left with her best friends? How many more nights of staying up and watching horror movies or crying over beautiful dialogs in romance movies? How many more mornings of waking up, realizing all three of them were late, and rushing to get dressed in time for their first class?

Her life as she knew it was coming to an end, so why not try to save time in a bottle while she could?

"Let's talk about this tomorrow, ok?" Bijou asked, her voice cracking as she stared at her two best friends with eyes loaded with tears.

A bittersweet smile broke out on her friends' faces as they nodded. They would suspend this moment as long as possible, taking advantage of it while they could.

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Boss walked into Hamtaro's room to find the boy intently reading one of his textbooks.

"Hey, kid," he said, sitting down at the edge of Hamtaro's bed. The other boy, however, barely nodded his head as he continued scanning the lines on the page.

"This is pretty importantâ€¦you might wanna put that book down," Boss explained as he crossed his hands over his chest.

Hamtaro, whose back was to Boss, shook his head.

"Can't. Bijou's crazy mom said we can't go to school or work until this matter is fixed, so the least I can do is make sure I keep up with the readings," he explained.

"Well the thing is," Boss cut in, the edge in his voice catching Hamtaro's attention, "I came to talk to you about your new wife."

Hamtaro slowly closed his book and turned in his chair. He looked at Boss quizzically. He was half-expecting a lecture on how stupid he was, as Boss was always the one to keep him in line. However, he never quite expected the conversation to take the route that it did.

"You have this plan, Hamtaro, to stay married for six months and then get a divorce," Boss began. The fact that he said "Hamtaro" instead of "kid" immediately indicated the level of severity Boss was speaking with, alerting Hamtaro further.

"Yeahâ€¦" With a slight nod of his head, Hamtaro urged Boss to continue.

"And you said Bijou was really hesitant about the entire thing to begin with," Boss asked more than said as his eyebrows rose. Hamtaro nodded.

"But she agreed to go along with it, even if it meant lying to her mother and dealing with a divorce in a few months. She's good with the plan so far," Hamtaro reminded.

"But that's the thing." Boss leaned forward, putting his fingers on his lips as he considered the situation a bit further.

"From what you told me, I don't think she's ok with it."

"She agreed to go along with it, so I don't think that's the case," Hamtaro shot back defensively.

"You told me you had to convince her a little, and you also told me she was really upset and scared about what her family would do to her. At the time, she probably thought she had no better option than to go along with your little scheme," Boss replied coolly.

"Because we don't have a better option, Boss! Her family will rip her apart for getting married like we did, and my parents won't be thrilled about it either. We made a mistake and yeahâ€"we're trying to cover it upâ€"but we have good intentions!"

"Maybe you should just own up to your mistake rather than go through with having a big, fancy wedding, telling everyone that the two of you are so in love and then eventually getting a divorce? What good would that do?"

"It'll do plenty of good," Hamtaro explained. "It keeps us from looking like two idiots."

"But I think looking like an idiot is better than what she'll have to go through when your plan is done and over with!" Boss cried, startling Hamtaro with his raised voice. The dark-haired Ham-Human quickly stood up.

"Hamtaro, don't you get it? Her family and yours come from two completely separate social standings. You told me yourself that Josie Ribon couldn't believe the fact that you had no royalty, wealthy businessmen or politicians in your family. Bijou's already getting in trouble for choosing you as a husband. You can't tell me that the rest of her family won't get aggravated as well! She's their heiress, kid, their flippin' heiress! She has a constant microscope over her head because of it, so the fact that she married someone like you is not gonna be smooth sailings for her. You know they'll give her hell for it, kid, and it'll be worse when you get the divorce. They'll point out that they'd been right the entire time about you, and her entire status will be in jeopardy."

Boss took in a deep breath, somewhat resembling a dragon as his nostrils flared and his eyes lowered upon the sight of Hamtaro sitting in his chair, calmly taking everything in.

"You can't tell me that's what you want for her, kid. You care about her."

Hamtaro's eyes widened. He stood up to match Boss's height, and for some reason, he could feel his heart thud against his ribs with an unfamiliar strength.

Just then, however, a vibration sounded. Before another word could be said, Hamtaro looked over to his desk and saw his phone light up. He had received a message.

Boss resisted rolling his eyes. Perfect.

"Who's it from?" he asked, sounding somewhat bored.

"Her," Hamtaro replied simply, his eyes never leaving the screen.

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Autumn nights are foreshadowing, Bijou mused as she sat on her stoop. She hugged her white coat tighter to herself as she stared up at the sky.

Indeed, the nights were so much longer than in the blithe months of summer. They hinted at the dark months winter would bring, and their very chill left one dreading the falling temperature of the future months.

But, the darkness of the night at least highlighted one thingâ€¦

"What are you looking at?"

Bijou looked down and to her side. Hamtaro was standing by the stoop, looking up but not seeing anything of particular interest.

"I didn't hear your car pull up," Bijou said as she watched his eyes scan the sky.

"I walked; it's only a few blocks," Hamtaro reminded, taking one final glance before looking over at the girl. "You didn't answer my first question, though. What were you looking at like that?"

Well, he really could be quite stupid sometimes. This wasn't exactly news for Bijou.

"What do most people look at when they stare at the night sky?" When Hamtaro didn't get the hint, Bijou let out a frustrated breath and cast her gaze skywards.

"Stars, idiot."

"You can't see any," Hamtaro reminded as he sat on the stairs beside her. "The lights from the city make it impossible." Hamtaro would know. He was very gifted with naming constellations, when stars were visible, of course.

"I used to think that," she explained. "But if you squint and actually look for them rather than just at them, they're pretty visible."

"If you squint, maybeâ€¦" Hamtaro thought aloud as he spotted a few specks of light in the sky.

"When I look up at the sky," Bijou started, a soft smile spreading over her face as a memory came rushing back to her, "The stars, you see, they're always sparkling. More than I can, at least."

Hamtaro's eyes immediately shifted to his wife, watching as her eyes shook. Everything she remembered, it hurt so much.

"Bijou-"

"Each gives off its own light, kind of like when people say everyone on this planet gives off their own aura. Yeahâ€¦I also want to shine really bright, so sometimes I close my eyes and promise myself that I will. I want to entrust that promise to a shooting star, so that it can take my promise and keep it safe, keep it true, across time."

The tears on her faceâ€¦they stung with warmth against her cold cheek. She looked at Hamtaro as another tear fell down her

cheek.

"But that shooting star never comes."

Hamtaro could feel his heart break as she continued. Unfortunately, he could only find himself immobilized as she spoke.

She moved her head and looked back up. "_I_ have to be the one that makes sure my promise remains true over time. _I_ have to make myself shine particularly bright. And that's whyâ€|"

Hamtaro felt his breath stop in his neck. It should've been the first thing he asked, really. Why did she call him here tonight? He suddenly had a horrible feeling about this allâ€|

Bijou's eyes continued lingering on the sky as the words left her mouth.

"That's whyâ€|I can't stay married to you."

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When I look up at the sky
>The stars, see, are sparkling
Each giving off its own light

>Like the people on this planet
Yeah, so I, too
>Want to shine particularly bright
I close my eyes and make a vow
in my heart
>And entrust my dreams to that shooting star<p>

I'm in my usual park
>I can see the night scenery
On the slide
>That's been my special seat for years
Whenever I'm worried about
something, I come here
>Just like then, I'm on my way to my dreams
But unable to fulfill
them
>"Maybe this is the end of the line"
There are days when I say
weak things like that
>But every time, I remember
That starry sky where I looked for a
shooting star
>The wish I made when I was little
Hasn't changed even now

When I look up at the sky
>The stars, see, are sparkling
Each giving off its own light

>Like the people on this planet
Yeah, so I, too
>Want to shine particularly bright
I close my eyes and make a vow
in my heart
>And entrust my dreams to that shooting star<p>

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Yeah, it's a short chapter today, but I think that's all that was really necessary.

Hamtaro and Bijou's conversation was based after the chorus of Home Made's "Shooting Star". It's a Japanese song, but I highly recommend you guys youtube it or something because it's a really sweet song and got me really emotional as I wrote the last scene.

I promise that the future updates will not be nearly as short or as long-awaited as these. We're getting to the climax of this story, so just wait for it :D

****Helsinki Demon****I actually like Sparkle, so I usually try to write her with redeemable qualities, except when she needs to be the villain (like in my fic "Bijou: Behind the Perfection"). But I'm glad you're enjoying the story so far, so thanks for the review!

****Lawliet's Angel****Nahh, I didn't write Stan as being "proud" of Hamtaro landing Bijou. I wrote him as confused and, "How am I not getting a girl like that but he is?!" because Stan believes he has all the moves and Hamtaro is a wasted case. lol Thanks for the review!

****LylHamgirl****If you get inspired to write every time you read one of my works, you should definitely write some more, missy! I'm glad you like the addition of Sparkle, as she is supposed to play a role in all of this. Thanks for the review!

****Moonlit-Milkyway****Your username is so pretty and hunger-inducing at the same time! Thanks for the review!

****Sandyandmaxwellfanatic**** You read all of Petals in one day? I must congratulate you for that, for this fic is well above the 50,000 words required to make a novel. And yes, you're right, this fic was planned out extensively. I almost consider it a project of sortsâ€|And I can tell just by your username that you liked this chapter (I'm hoping)â€|? Thanks for reviewing!

****Shadow Bijou****I'm simply using Celestial Night's characters because she let me, but no, I am not Celestial Night (you're not the first to assume so, like I told you :D). I understand Josie's accent was a little thick, but in my experience with French, they seem to carry that accent so I try to make it as accurate as possible. The question to where Hamtaro and Bijou will be living will be answered soon; I'm purposefully suspending that conversation. As for the "o.O" face, that's just a face I use when someone is completely confused. And yes, you're right, Maxwell and Sandy are important. They will show up soon, and one of them will interveneâ€|

How does one tell their boss, who was totally into them, that they got married? What happens when Roger finds out! *cue suspenseful

music*

-CN

18. A Million Lacey Handkerchiefs

Ok guys, I know the last chapter was short, but every bit of authorial instinct in me told me to make it a short chapter. It had to be one of those bridging chapters. I tried to make it longer, but I couldn't. Chapter four was a bridging chapter, and the previous chapter was the last one for this part of the story. So yes, we're entering the last phase for Part 1 (this'll make better sense in a couple of months).

CN

Petals

**Chapter Eighteen: **_A Million Lacey Handkerchiefs_

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"That's whyâ€¦I can't stay married to you."

Her eyes were still dazedly glancing over the stars that rested millions of miles from her reach. They were so far away, still, but she felt that if she could secure her future and set herself on the right path immediately, they would come closer to her ever-reaching fingers.

Hamtaro, not wanting to show his distress, immediately looked at the stars with his wife. It took him a minute, but after clearing his throat and thinking of what exactly to say, he spoke.

"Does that mean we're not going through with the plan?" he asked cautiously, his eyes shifting to her while his head remained up.

Despite his stress level taking an obvious surge upwards, Bijou felt herself smile as she looked over at him.

"Yes, and I want to get an annulment as soon as possible," she clarified, looking the most content she had in days.

_Annulmentâ€¦_Well, that would certainly make their plan null and void.

Panicking, Hamtaro scrambled onto the stoop and sat in front of her, determined to get her to change her mind. Since he was so insistent

on his little plan in the first place, Bijou wasn't exactly surprised when he took her hands in his, his eyes pleading.

"Bijou," he repeated her name slowly, looking so hard into her emerald eyes that it almost hurt his ocular muscles, "when our families find out--"

"Yeah, we'll be in trouble," she agreed, looking off to the side as she gathered her thoughts and her courage. "But I'd rather they scold us now for making an honest mistake than putting up a farce and getting a divorce."

"They won't know the marriage was a farce!" the boy reminded a little desperately.

"Why are you so intent on this anyway? If you just think for a minute about the repercussions of telling the truth now and then dealing with our families in a few monthsâ€¦well, it's smarter to just own up," she reminded, looking at him with softened eyes.

"It'll be fine; we'll be fine," she said as she gave his hands a gentle squeeze. He was looking down, and that's when Bijou pulled her hands away. Hamtaro was obviously upset that she decided to stop their scheme before it began, but she knew deep down that this was the most mature way to handle things. It would take him a while, but he'd come around eventually.

She sighed as she looked at the sky once more, her mind playing and replaying the conversation she would have to have with her mother within the next couple of days.

"I'm the heir to my family."

Her hair flew in silky white strands as she turned to face him. Hamtaro wasn't looking at her; rather, his elbow was leaning against the railing to the stoop and his hand was supporting his face. As he spoke, the words didn't leave his mouth easily. It was something he apparently had difficulty admitting.

"Whatâ€¦did you say?" the French Ham-Human asked as her hair fluttered across her face in a gorgeous windswept manner.

Hamtaro shrugged and closed his eyes. "I just told you the truthâ€¦I'm the heir to my family."

There remained enough silence between the two of them that a few crickets from the backyard could be heard chirping in the next minute or two. Bijou took in the information, unable to keep her fists from clenching. Hamtaro, on the other hand, was a little embarrassed. She was the last person he had ever expected to tell this to.

"Like, you inherit most of the family's money, that kind of heir?" she finally asked, watching his almost bored expression tentatively.

"Among other things, yeahâ€¦"

Bijou stood up without warning. When her husband looked at her, he was shocked to see such fury etched into her eyes. Her normally-pale

cheeks were now burning, evident even under the monstrously dark sky.

"You ridiculed me when you found out about me being an heiress. You told me that my money was the sole reason I got anything—be it jobs, college acceptances, suitors—anything! And now you're telling me that you of all people are the heir to your family's money just so I can agree to your stupid plan?!"

"Well it's not like I inherit a vault-full of money like you do!" he retorted as he stood up, being at least a full head taller than her. He looked down at her, but their height difference hardly intimidated the girl. She stared up at him and looked as if she could strangle him.

"I didn't want to tell you when I first pitched the idea, because then you would've said no for sure. But you asked why I was so 'intent' on my plan working, and now you have it," he further explained, staring down and keeping his gaze firm. Bijou's eyes narrowed in disgust.

"Well now I'm definitely refusing to be a part of this any longer. I'm an heir, but that certainly doesn't give me the right to pretend to be married for six months," she replied as she swiftly turned around. She put a hand over her face in frustration as she walked away from the stoop, amazed at how stupid this man could be.

"Because the pressure your mother puts on you is to take over the company. What my entire family wanted me to do ever since I started college was to find a wife as soon as possible."

"So that's where I come in, right?" Bijou responded as she turned around yet again. She had both her fists clenched now as she walked up to Hamtaro.

"I don't see any benefit for me in this. Your family is all happy because you found me, but my family will just be humiliated because I married a man of no stature of monetary value. My family comes from men who normally have both!"

"Nice to see you're not shallow," Hamtaro commented, resulting in the girl rolling her eyes. "And there is a benefit for you, but you've been denying it since we came back from your mother's office this afternoon."

"I'd love to hear it then!" Bijou attempted to raise her feet, trying to give herself some leverage in height since she didn't like having to look up to see Hamtaro.

"You love doing something your mother thinks is wrong. You know that your mother knows this whole take was a mistake, but that only gets your clock ticking faster," he explained, amused at her feeble attempt to get taller. He brought both hands up to her shoulders and pushed them down with ease, causing the girl to stand flat on her feet much to her distress.

"And you say that with such confidence how?" Bijou tried her best to push what he just said to the back of her mind. She wouldn't even humor the very possibility of seem teenage-like rebellion against her

mother. Going against her mother never proved to be a smart endeavor, and she thought she had made this point clear to him on more than one occasion.

"Because I've known you since we were in pre-school, and I know how much you've been dying for an opportunity like this," Hamtaro replied coolly.

"I was crying when we walked out of Ribon Jewelers today, remember? If I was really dying for a chance to fool my mother, I sure fooled me!"

Bijou was quickly losing her cool. If it wasn't enough the jerk had been an heir this whole time, now he was insistent about this stupid plan of his as well as this insane idea that she enjoyed this entire situation.

"Hmph. After spending so much time with you lately, I'm pretty sure I'm getting to know you better than I know myself," he said smoothly as he closed his eyes and put crossed his hands over his chest. Before Bijou could get in a response, he continued. "So, are we still good-to-go for the plan?"

"No! You haven't done anything to convince me otherwise. In fact, now I'm even more positive that we need to take the high road rather than try to cover everything up," Bijou said in what she found to be a very mature, adult voice as she nodded her head to herself.

"Didn't you already tell your mother that you would stay married to me?" Hamtaro reminded. At this, Bijou's eyes lowered as she remembered what she told her mother.

"I am sorry you weren't informed of the wedding, but I do honestly love him, and we're going to stay married."

She remembered how she considered her decision before she said those words. She knew she would regret it, but she chose to accept Hamtaro's plan, anyway, because she honestly believed at the moment it would be best to go along with it.

When Hamtaro had said that he was starting to understand Bijou, he wasn't bluffing. At the moment, he was watching the debate, once again, ignite in Bijou's mind. He had also learned in his twenty-two years that one had to strike while the iron was hot.

"I have my own fears about this plan toppling over on me, but we've both taken risks before. You knew your mother wouldn't be happy if you went into science over business, but you went for it anyway, even if she tries to make you regret your decision," he said quietly, letting his words settle in her mind and stir for a bit. She needed to willingly go along with this, and he planned to make good use out of that A in General Psychology he had earned a couple of semesters ago.

"Butâ€¦I don't regret going into science. I'm already starting to regret agreeing to your plan, though, so that's why I want to stop before we get ahead of ourselves," she said softly as she looked at him, confused about what to do next.

"It's up to you, Bijou," Hamtaro said, feigning indifference as he

shrugged. "But I think that sticking to your word will show your mother how strong you are. It's either that or admitting she was right all along, which will give her the impression that she is indeed in control of you." Bijou's look turned into one of worry as this thought played out in front of her.

His words, they actually had some basis. But would admitting fault now really be better or worse than taking on the humiliation of divorce in a few months? She thought she had the answer, but Hamtaro was actually making her think otherwise. That was never a good sign.

Bijou turned around and put both her hands against her lips, thinking hard as she knew what she decided on now would determine her fate for the next six months. There were so many pros and cons, thoughâ€¦if only she had more time!

Hamtaro realized that this very moment was critical in his plan. If he tried to sway her decision, she might feel he was pressuring her way too strongly and then completely back down, which was why he was currently silent. He took this opportunity to observe the girl's back as well as the rest of her figure.

He had always liked the way her hair fell down her back to its center, having but a single wave in the otherwise-straight, silky locks. In middle school she had tied her hair in pigtails with blue ribbons, and he didn't like that style so much. As much as he liked to tease her about it, her white hair stood out and made her different, something that Hamtaro oddly enough felt proud about, now that he thought about it.

She also wasn't the curviest thing in the world. She had a slight hourglass figure, but nothing that was adult magazine-worthy. Though many men would say she was probably too thin for their liking, Hamtaro had always preferred her body size to that of more well-endowed girls. (He had always thought that way, though. He was sure it had nothing to do with Bijou herself.)

So much to think about and not enough time! Bijou was completely oblivious to Hamtaro checking her out, though on any other occasion she would've noticed and surely slapped him for his stupid male tendencies. At the moment, however, she had to make sure her decision would be best and that she wouldn't sway from it in the next few months. She had to make sure it would benefit her more than the other choice. Basically, she was stuck between proving her mother right right now or waiting another six months before her mother realized she had been correct all along. Either way, she was going to get a lecture. But if she didn't go along with Hamtaro's plan, the lecture would probably come on Monday. If she went along with it, she could at least wait until she graduated college before getting told offâ€¦right before she was to take over the companyâ€¦

A light bulb went off in Bijou's head.

She turned around, startling the orange-and-white-haired Ham-Human with the eagerness in her eyes.

"If I get a divorce six months from now, the same time my mother wants me to take over the company, there's a huge chance she'll see me as unfit for being CEO!"

Hamtaro never thought he'd see a girl so excited at the prospect of being thrown out of an executive job, but Bijou Ribon was far from normal.

"I'm glad to see you found a silver lining in all of this," he said, happier that the plan really wasn't being discarded.

"This might actually work," Bijou agreed, though her smile faded as she realized that she would, ultimately, have to own up. Just not now—the timing was key here.

"So we're good, right?" he asked, just to make sure. The French girl wrung her hands nervously, but nevertheless nodded, her eyes still looking sadly to the side.

"Ohhh, thankyouthankyouthankyouthankyou!!!!!" Hamtaro cried as he picked up the girl from the bag and swung her around. Due to the sudden lack of feet being on ground, Bijou cried and grabbed Hamtaro's neck as if her life depended on it.

"Put me down, you idiot!" she said, seeing nothing but a blur of images as she was spun. In response, Hamtaro finally put the girl—who had dizzy spirals instead of eyes—down and he hugged her, putting his neck against her chin and burying his hands in the hair he had just been thinking about. In the few seconds it took for Bijou to regain full motor control, Hamtaro admitted to letting his hands linger a tad bit longer than necessary, but no one was here to see so it was all good.

"But," he heard Bijou's voice break through his momentary euphoria. He immediately released her and looked at her as she spoke.

"You need to change," she said as plain as day.

"Err—how so?" he asked, lost with good reason.

"Well, my family has standards," Bijou said, her voice indicating that this really didn't need further explanation. When Hamtaro continued giving her a blank stare, she sighed.

"Well, you can't just wear what you are right now," she said, using her hand to gesture up-and-down at his current attire.

Hamtaro looked down and was a bit confused. He was wearing a long-sleeve T-shirt and jeans. They might not have been high-end Parisian couture, but he thought it was at least passing, or so he thought.

"My family believes in attaining the highest quality that one can afford," Bijou indicating, gesturing to the navy blue, form-fitting, ampere-waistline top she had on with her light blue designer jeans (all under her pricy white pea coat, of course).

"Too bad I can't afford to pay for jeans like that. Normally I save that money for rent," Hamtaro said bitterly, rolling his eyes.

"Well, consider it my wedding gift to you," the girl replied, donning a bright, all too innocent smile.

"Consider what your gift to meâ€|?" She had never quite given that look to him before, but she looked much too much like a girl ready to give a makeover.

Cats.

"Just let me make a phone call," Bijou said, pulling her phone out from her pocket. As she looked through her list of contacts, the smile simply grew bigger and bigger.

"I'll get my personal shopper to take you out tomorrow and get you a whole new wardrobe! It'll be a completely new you!"

"Whaâ€|But what if I like the old me?!!"

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Hamtaro spun around, actually liking what he saw in the mirror's reflection. He adjusted the cuffs of his shirt so that they came out under his jacket, all the while admitting that Ribon hadn't been so completely off about this shopping thing.

He thought it was a nightmare when a woman and a man came knocking on his door the previous morning. The woman was Bijou's shopper; she was there because Bijou had given her explicit instructions on what she thought would best suit Hamtaro. The man was a personal shopper with some of the best knowledge on cutting-edge menswear.

Hamtaro had to follow them around like a dog yesterday. He thought it would only take a couple of hours, but in reality they had spent almost nine hours shopping for clothes in some of the priciest stores he had ever seen.

They had bought more shirts, pants, jackets and blazers for Hamtaro in those 9 hours than he had ever owned in his entire life. When he called Bijou last night to tell her how much they had in fact bought, she sounded unfazed and said:

"That's a decent fall wardrobe, but I suppose we'll have to go shopping again when winter comes around."

The funniest part was, as much as he swore he would hate Bijou's taste in clothing for him, it was actually just the opposite. He noticed that the woman shopper directed him to clothes similar to what he would normally wear, just a bit more elaborate and about seven times as expensive. Both shoppers had also told him how to arrange his new clothing to suit his needs, like how the same blazer could be worn to a coffee date as well as to a job interview. As much as Stan teased him for it when he walked into his apartment with twelve shopping bags in his hands, he had learned useful skills, he had to admit.

And yeah, all the clothes he bought had totaled about three years of rent, but Bijou, once again, seemed unmoved at the price (she almost found it amusing that he thought such an amount of money was considered "way too much").

Currently, he wore a slightly form-fitting dark blazer with a graphic T-shirt layered tastefully underneath, and beneath that was a collared dress shirt, the cuffs of which he had just finished adjusting to come out of his jacket. He was wearing gray dress pants and shoes that matched his blazer. He thought Bijou was serious when she said "completely new you", but in reality she had simply fine-tuned his tastes. He would have to thank her for that when he saw her at lunch today.

He walked over to the dresser and picked up one of the many bottles of high-priced cologne he was bought yesterday. As he applied the scent that he liked best, he felt a sinking feeling in his stomach: today, unlike most of the kids who had gone back from October break to classes, Hamtaro and Bijou were told they could not return to school or work until this whole situation was taken care of. Hamtaro wasn't sure what that meant, but he planned on asking his mother-in-law when he saw her at lunch today.

As he finished with the cologne and set it back on the table, his stomach did a somersault. He was really not looking forward to lunch with the woman at all. Bijou said she would come over right about now so that they could go together, but so far she hadn't showed, something that made Hamtaro all the more nervous (not her absence, of course, just that he would have to go face his intimidating in-law alone).

As if on cue, he heard a knock on the door. He took one last look in the mirror, hoping that he looked alright. He was about to fix a lock of hair that looked out of place before he realized he was acting like a Ribon-esque prat. He quickly left the room and ran to the door, finding his lovely wife on the other side.

Bijou looked taken aback as she saw Hamtaro open the door. Her eyes widened, taking in his well-tailored form.

"Does the outfit look ok?" he asked, looking down. He felt like an idiot asking so self-consciously about clothing, but since he wasn't meeting with an ordinary woman, and these were all new clothes, he felt the need to be sure.

Bijou blinked, still taking in how he looked. Hamtaro's face fell.

"I got a lot of clothes, so I can change-" He was interrupted when Bijou put a hand up to the fabric of his blazer, touching its lapel and then looking up at him.

"The outfit's fine. It's really good, actually," she said, her eyes flitting gently over to his hair.

"The color of the jacket just makes your hair stand out in a different wayâ€¦I like it," she explained. He could feel his heartbeat thunder in his ears as he realized there was the softest of pink blushes coming onto her face.

Their eyes were locked and they remained that way for a few seconds before Hamtaro realized something.

"Waitâ€¦what are you wearing?" he asked as he looked down at her. She had a long white coat on today, and it covered whatever it was

that she had on underneath.

"We're both dressed appropriately for the occasion, so it doesn't matter," Bijou explained as she turned on her heel. It was time to go.

"No, no," Hamtaro said as he grabbed her by the elbow, annoying the girl.

"You made me buy two closets worth of clothing. You can at least show me what you're wearing."

Bijou wiggled her arm out of his hold. "You can see when we get to the restaurant."

"Bijou," the man said sternly, walking up to her. In response, the heiress backed further into the hallway of the apartment complex. In the back of her mind, she actually found all of this very amusing because he was so paranoid about how he looked. And he said she was ridiculous when it came to looks.

"Unbutton your coat," Hamtaro ordered as she leaned against the hallway wall. She had the most miniscule smirk gracing the upper corners of her lips.

"Wow, Bijou! You must be really good if Hamtaro's asking for it in the middle of the hallway," Stan, who didn't have a class until that afternoon, observed as he came out of the elevator, a takeout bag in one hand.

Bijou blushed but found herself rolling her eyes at Stan's antics.

Hamtaro, on the other hand, gave Stan a look that made the strawberry-blond's immense smile completely vanish.

Hamtaro glared at him until Stan mumbled a quick, "Ok, hey, I'm sorry!" and disappeared into the apartment, promptly shutting the door behind him. Hamtaro continued glaring at the door for a few seconds, still furious.

When the man finally turned to face Bijou, he noticed she had her white coat folded and draped over one of her arms. She did a quick spin for him, giving him an, "Are you happy now?" look when she finished.

Currently, she had on a form-fitting white sundress with a scooping neckline and short, slightly puffy sleeves. She wore a silver necklace with tiny pink jewels, meant to bring out the tiny little pink flowers that decorated the hem and neckline of the dress. The white dress also had a pink string that tied in a knot just under her chest, accenting her tiny figure. The dress just scraped past her knees. She wore white pumps on her feet, the exact shade of her dress.

"See? I'm not overdressed or anything, so you're fine," she said as she started to dig through her bag. As she pulled out her cell phone and checked the time, she sighed.

"We only have about half an hour to get to the restaurant, so come

on!" she urged as she started walking towards the elevator.

It took Hamtaro a minute to realize she was walking away. His mind had gone blank for a minute, and he couldn't quite figure out why. Though, he had a hunch with the way his mind's eye kept replaying Bijou spinning around in that dress.

"Umm, you look good in white," he said in a somewhat awkward sounding tone as he watched her press the button for the elevator.

"Do you need a cough drop?" Bijou replied, looking at him curiously. After clearing his throat for a good couple of seconds, he shook his head.

As they boarded the elevator, Hamtaro couldn't help but recall a conversation they had in Kyoto while in an elevator.

"Hey," Hamtaro said softly, startling the girl who was currently putting on her coat, "what are you gonna do about Mr. Asayo?"

As Bijou's shoulders dropped, letting the white coat fall into place, she looked to the side and shook her head.

"I haven't come up with a decision yet."

Hamtaro sighed and also looked down. _So she _had_ been thinking about it._

"You liked him, right?" he asked, staring straight at the elevator paneling and not at her.

Bijou shrugged. "I still do. It's only been a few days since he asked me out on that coffee date. What is he going to think of me now?" She laughed sadly. "You know, a guy like him only comes around once in a blue moon."

She was abruptly taken out of her melancholy thoughts when she heard Hamtaro bang against the elevator wall with his fist. The thudding caused a reverberation in the small room that lasted a couple of seconds and finished just as the elevator doors opened.

"What was that?" she asked, looking at the spot on the wall where Hamtaro's fist was settled against the aluminum paneling.

"I thought I saw a bug," the man replied tersely as he pulled his fist back and walked out of the elevator without another word.

Speechless, Bijou looked quizzically at the man's retreating back before she ran out of the elevator to catch up with him.

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The restaurant, to Hamtaro, could best be described as a million lacey handkerchiefs. The restaurant itself wasn't very big, but big was the society it fed.

All the circular tables were arranged on a gorgeous, off-white

oriental rug. There was a beautiful crystal chandelier dangling from the center of the room. Each of the tables was decorated with a silky, paisley-patterned off-white tablecloth and they all had tea lights surrounding the off-white flower centerpieces. The walls were covered in a creamy, cloth-like wallpaper that had an off-white sheen to it. The chairs surrounding the tables were silver in the frame, matching the silver tints found dispersed in the oriental rug, but they had an off-white, cloth backing and padding.

"Didn't you say this restaurant was called The Red Candle?" Hamtaro asked as he looked at his wife, taking in the very obvious color pallet of the room.

"_La Bougie Rouge_, yeah," Bijou said, not getting what was so hard to understand about it. She wasn't fully paying attention to his words, though, for she was looking at the various tables in the small room, searching for her mother.

She grabbed his elbow and held onto it as she whispered, "There she is!"

Hamtaro followed her gaze to the far right corner of the room where a woman who, from far away, looked like Bijou's twin, was sitting. She was idly skimming over the menu, not noticing that her daughter and son-in-law had arrived.

Glancing at each other once for support, the two quickly made their way across the room.

Josie Ribon looked up as she saw her daughter stand behind the chair across from her. Her gray eyes scanned over Hamtaro and Bijou for a good ten to fifteen seconds before she gestured for the two to sit down. Hamtaro quickly (albeit a little clumsily) pulled out a chair for his wife, and pushed it in for her once she sat down. Hamtaro quickly sat down next to Bijou and nervously waited.

"_Bonjour, muzzer. Ôªa va?_" Bijou asked, plastering a smile to her face as she feigned eagerness. She folded her hands elegantly in front of her, trying her best to look excited about this whole thing.

"_Oui, ouiâ€|et tu?_" Josie's slate-colored eyes landed on Hamtaro, observing his choice in clothing and remembering what he was wearing when she saw him at the airport two days ago.

Hamtaro gulped. He knew he was being asked a question, but he didn't understand a word of French, something that Josie realized immediately with a small smile.

"We're both doing v-v-well," Bijou said, stuttering on the last word due to her re-emerging accent that popped up 90 percent of the time when she was dealing with her mother.

"Hmâ€|if you zon't speak French, wellâ€|_zat_ could be a problem," Josie said as she took a sip of her sparkling cider, looking over her glass at Hamtaro.

"I'm a fast learner," Hamtaro quickly supplied, returning Josie's unwavering stare. Her eyes moved, not unlike her daughter's when they shifted their sight, to Bijou (who looked perky as ever).

"'e needz lessonz," Josie ordered rather than suggested. Bijou quickly nodded her head.

"Of courze!"

Alright, more of me is being changed without my consent, Hamtaro thought dryly. Nevertheless, he kept the smile firm on his face as his mother-in-law took another sip of her drink.

"Onto moreâ€|prezzing matterz." Josie folded her hands in her lap and looked over at the two.

"I vant zhee ceremony to be weezhin two weeks," she explained. A thought hit her and she pulled her designer bag into her lap. From there, she pulled out a planner and opened up to the current date.

"The wedding ceremony?" Hamtaro asked nervously as he looked from Bijou to her mother. Bijou nodded while Josie ignored his question.

"But that's a little early, isn't it? I mean you have to get catering, book a place, do the invitationsâ€|" he seemed a little frantic as he thought all this out loud. If it wasn't enough that he had a job and college life to keep up with, adding a wedding within the next fourteen days was just completely ridiculous.

"All zhose zhings can be zun once you 'ave zhee proper financial support," Josie said idly as she flipped to the next couple of pages, considering what weekend would be best for the day.

"I still think we should wait for winter break at the very leastâ€|We would have more time then, anyway," Hamtaro suggested to the older woman. It was Bijou who responded.

"My family expects me to put on a wedding now. Ribons hold great value in these ceremonies; we always have," she explained. She blinked a couple of times, hoping that Hamtaro would just get the hint and accept her mother's decision.

"But we can have an amazing ceremony, Bijou, given a proper amount of time!" Hamtaro couldn't help that his voice rose ever so slightly.

"I already told you," Josie cut in, giving a sharp look to her son-in-law, "zat planning eez not a problem at all eef," she stressed the word as her eyes lowered challengingly, "your family 'az money."

"Fortunately," Hamtaro said, causing Bijou to look on in horror as she heard the edge in his voice, "Bijou married me without looking for a price tag."

"I 'eard alcohol doez zat to one'z perception," Josie replied with a smirk. Bijou blushed as Hamtaro realized his wife was every bit her mother's daughter. So that's where Bijou had gotten her arguing abilities from.

"Eef you want to call off zhis sham of a wezzing, just say zhee

word," Josie said as she rested a pale hand under her chin. She glanced at Bijou as she finished this, wanting her daughter to just admit to this entire thing. She did not enjoy seeing her daughter put up such an illusion.

Hamtaro expected Bijou to reply immediately, but alas, the young French girl remained quiet as she lowered her head. This alarmed Hamtaro even more for he could feel her indecision seeping through the little cracks in her brain. She could ultimately decide to please her mother in all of this, and thenâ€¦well, they'd get an annulment, wouldn't they?

Hamtaro was about to reply for her when she suddenly raised her eyes and spoke with a clarity that he had never heard her use in the presence of her mother before.

"I told you, mother, I married him because I cared for him. As far as legality goes, I'm officially his wife so I couldn't care less about a ceremony for show," she explained as she folded her hands in a professional manner on the table.

"But because it will please you and the rest of our family, I'll agree to it. _However_, I don't know if I can tolerate anymore jabs at my relationship," Bijou finished, giving the identical stare to Josie's never-moving one.

Hamtaro felt his chest swell with pride. _That's my Bijou._

The way Josie rolled her eyes sent the confidence shooting out of Hamtaro and Bijou. Clearly, she realized, they would not let this go. Well, if they wanted to try and pull a fast one on her, then so be it.

"And where will you live, exactly?" she asked as she continued flipping through her planner's pages, circling a weekend she thought would be good for the wedding.

At this, Bijou had to look to Hamtaro. When they first got off their flight from Kyoto, he told her he would arrange the living situation. But Bijou hadn't seriously thought about the scenario since.

"My house," Hamtaro explained calmly. His wife looked over at him curiously, completely confused.

"Zhee apartment you currently live in?" Hamtaro wasn't sure just how Josie knew he lived in an apartment, but he shook his head anyway.

"No, the house I own."

Now Bijou was really curious, but she pretended like she knew exactly what Hamtaro was saying as he continued speaking. Her mother, oddly enough, seemed interested in what he had to say as well.

"I'm my family's heir. When my grandfather wrote his will, he gave me the deed to a house, his house, about half an hour north of here, and I inherited the house when I turned eighteen," he enlightened with a casual voice.

Well, Bijou thought, _he wouldn't lie about something his dead

grandfather did, right?_ Though the fact that he left this part out irked her even more than before. If he had plans to move her into such a house, he could've at least given her a hint! They needed to trust each other if they were to fool everyone else!

"Alright," Josie said quietly. She sighed, not actually expecting Hamtaro to be the owner of an actual property. She flipped to the very front of her planner where several business cards were arranged in neat little plastic holders within her planner. She pulled out a card and handed it to Bijou.

Bijou quickly took the card. Before she could read it, Josie felt the need to explain.

"She eez zhee most 'ighly-referred wezzing planner I know of," she said, gesturing for Bijou to read the card. Bijou's eyes slowly glanced down at the name.

"Komachi," she repeated, noting the single name on the card as well as an address and a couple of telephone and fax numbers.

"She caterz az well."

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"Hmph. There's Prude-taro himself," Stan said, not hiding his disdain, as Hamtaro entered his apartment later that afternoon.

"Stan, how many times do I have to tell ya? You can't say anything like that about the kid's wife," Boss sighed, leaning into the couch as he shook his head.

"I think a 'congratulations on your wedding' would have been a more appropriate comment," Oxnard chimed, nodding to himself at the excellent choice of words.

"I'm certainly not gonna congratulate Hamtaro for getting drunk and making a mistake like that!" Stan exclaimed. He looked at the slightly amused Hamtaro, who had chosen to let the blonde vent, and pointed his finger at him.

"I've been trying to get one of Sandy's friends on a date for yearsâ€"Crystal, Pashmina, Bijou! And they've never looked at me twice. And you haven't even been _actively_ pursuing Bijou Ribon for a minute before she becomes your wife. That, my friend, is not fair." Stan put a hand up to Hamtaro's face, walked past him and to the front door.

"Now if the rest of you will excuse me, I have classes to attend unlike some of us who get _rewarded_ by now having to go to school or work!" With that said, Stan slammed the door.

"He'll be back," Hamtaro sighed.

"Do you need to talk to him?" Boss asked, looking over to him.

"No, he forgot his backpack." Hamtaro pointed to the bag lying at the

base of the kitchen counter. Boss shook his head again, and then he decided to comment on Hamtaro's clothes.

"So you're even starting to dress like you belong to one of those high-end society groups?"

Hamtaro was currently sitting on one of the counter's stools. He had a can of soda in front of him, but that remained untouched as he thought about something somberly.

"Kid?"

"Bijou," Hamtaro started to say, oblivious to the fact that Boss was talking to him, "is at the Botanical Gardens right now; she's going to tell Mr. Asayo why we won't be coming in for the next two weeks."

"Does that worry you, kid?" Boss replied as he walked around the couch to where Hamtaro was sitting. Even Oxnard turned to see Hamtaro's reaction.

"That's not it," Hamtaro mused, putting a fist under his chin as he thought about it some more.

"The part that bothers me is that she insisted I don't come."

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When Bijou walked into Roger Asayo's office, she hadn't expected he'd be on the phone. The handsome man looked up at her for a moment, his eyes lingering on her flattering dress and her pink-glossed lips, before he gestured to her that he'd be on the line for a couple more minutes.

Bijou nodded, taking in his scent which drifted through the office like the aroma of a candle. She held her coat in one hand while holding a file in the other. She had a death grip on both, but she had a good idea of why she was suddenly so nervous.

After what seemed like an eternity of watching him (though Bijou couldn't exactly say she minded), he put down the receiver and glanced up at the girl.

"Bijou, you and Hamtaro weren't at work today," he said curiously as he motioned for her to sit. He did likewise, but just as he felt the pricy leather chair under him, he sat back up.

"Oh! There's something I'd like for you to see." Bijou quickly got out of the chair she had just finished sitting down in and moved to where Roger was standing by his wall-length window. Normally, the window had its blinds drawn, but today, for whatever reason, they were wide open, revealing the botanical gardens underneath.

"Your office has a beautiful view," Bijou commented, wide-eyed, looking at the gorgeous array of plants and colors she saw before her. The variously-colored petals all worked together with the greens of the grasses and the blue hues of the ponds to bring forth a truly

astounding pallet.

"They just finished adding to the South Wing while you guys were gone. Well, they have a bit more landscaping to do, but overall it was a busy few days and we've gotten most of it done," he said, in love with what he saw before him.

"I seeâ€|so it'll be open soon?" Bijou asked in her best attempt to initiate small talk. However, her lack of excitement about the newsâ€|actually, her voice which was much too low and unhappy than what he was used to hearingâ€|was the giveaway that there was something more going on here. Roger was, after all, very good at reading people.

"Within a few months, yes." His turquoise eyes did a once-over on her, noticing her almost detached body language.

"This is the report of the business trip," Bijou explained, giving the folder she had in one of her hands over to the man.

"It has the designs and the plans for the new lab technology, as well as the protocols that are to be used when it arrives and when it's in the lab. We also got the brochures and pamphlets for those German bedrock companies that want to do a project with the gardens. Since we're the branch that has the largest geological lab, I thought you'd like to know. Oh and-"

Before Bijou could ramble on any further, the blonde-haired man put his finger on her lips in an attempt to quiet her down. Bijou relished this feeling for a fleeting second.

"Relax, I'll go through the report so you don't have to give me a synopsis. More importantlyâ€|Is everything alright, Bijou? You didn't return any of the calls I left you, and you and your little business trip partner didn't show up today," he asked as he removed his hand from her face.

"I'm sorry." She lowered her head. "But I don't think we'll come in for the next two weeks, at the very least."

Roger nearly took a step back, unable to hide the confusion on his normally-stunning face.

"'We?' You andâ€|Hamtaro?" When Bijou nodded, still keeping her head down, he continued. "Well why not?"

Bijou shrugged weakly. "We have some things to take care ofâ€|"

When Bijou didn't elaborate, Roger asked for her to continue.

"Like what?"

The girl looked at her white heels. "Wedding plans."

Roger dropped the report. However, as he was a very smart man, he refused to let his emotions get the best of him. He quickly bent down to pick it up, and just as quickly reemerged with it in his hands.

Bijou finally had the courage to look at him in the eyes, though she

was obviously regretful. Roger, on the other hand, was looking at the report cover while he continued to speak.

"A wedding for who?" though he knew he didn't need to ask, he wanted to be sure. He had to be sure.

Bijou chewed on her lip before she could continue. "Us. Hamtaro and me," she clarified, still trying to make eye contact with her boss.

He finally lifted his gaze to meet hers, and Bijou was floored when she saw the actual amount of disappointment reflected in his brilliant orbs.

"I'm confused. I thought you and I were--"

"I made you a copy," Bijou explained, pulling a DVD out of her bag. "Please, just watch it. It'll explain everything." She bit her lip, able to feel a bit of blood pour out before she spoke any further.

"And please, I need to ask you to keep this quiet," she pleaded. She could not bring herself to cry for she knew she had to look strong. She couldn't look like she would regret anything. What she was doing to her mother she had to do to him.

"I don't even know what I'm agreeing to and how exactly my two employees got engaged," Roger replied, clenching his perfect teeth together.

"We were never engaged," Bijou explained softly, coming up to the man. He was taller than Hamtaro, but she didn't mind looking up at him into his deep eyes. There was something so much more mature about him that made Bijou want to stay this way for hours on end.

"How does that work?" he asked as he dropped the report on his desk. When he turned back to look at Bijou he realized she was still staring intently at him.

"How could I possibly say yes to be married to someone else," Bijou started to ask, "when I'm growing all these feelings just for you?"

As she finished, she leaned up on her toes and kissed him.

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Like I said in my beginning notes, the previous chapter had to be short. I knew that the placement had to make it so that this particular chapter had a lot going on, but for it to be more effective, chapter seventeen needed to be a little lacking in plot

advancements.

And this chapter was important to me because it was one of the first ones I ever planned when I designed this fic many, many months ago. I'm so happy I finally got to write it!!

And I think I told you guys a few chapters ago, regarding Bijou, _"She may just fall in love with somebody elseâ€¦"_ Who thought I was bluffing?

Normally, I don't like to describe the clothes the characters are wearing. It seems like unnecessary detail, but this chapter showed off how stylish our hero and heroine are and I couldn't resist!

****Crystalgurl101-****Don't apologize for not reviewing! I definitely don't review every chapter I read, a habit I'm trying to fix. Often times, I forget, but sometimes, I admit, I feel too lazy to do anything. I'm glad you liked Sparkle, though I definitely didn't peg you as one of her fans. I'm really glad you got the point of the last chapter, i.e. Bijou's jealousy towards Sandy and Maxwell and Hamtaro's ever-growing feelings for her! Thanks for reviewing!

****Lawliet's Angel-****I hope this chapter lived up to your expectations. And it's not so much that Hamtaro doesn't get the rules of society as much as he doesn't really want to let Bijou go (hmm, or is that considered a spoiler at this point?). :D Did you see the name I included in this chapter? I'm sorry you had to wait so long, but she's coming. Thanks for reviewing!

****LylHamgirl-****Well, I'm not so sure about them "falling in love" just yet (or at all!), but they _will_ have a "real" wedding. Just wait for it! Thanks for the review!

****Moonlight-Milkyway-****Glad you caught onto Hamtaro's need to get schooled xD Thanks for the review!

****Sandyandmaxwellfanatic-****The best HxB fic ever? You have no idea how much that compliment means to me! I'm really glad you enjoyed the chapter, so thank you! I'll see if I can include more Sandy and Maxwell for you, but trust me, there's plenty planned for part 2 of the fic.

****Shadow Bijou-****I know, last chapter was lacking, but like I said, I couldn't write the chapter any other way. It was like my mind couldn't come up with a longer chapter because I knew this chapter had to be exactly the way it was. As to what roles Maxwell and Sandy will play. Hmm, I guess I should finish updating "Petals"'s prequel, "Unfurling", but there's a connection between Maxwell and Bijou (another spoiler!). Sandy and Pashmina will play their own parts in the next part of the story, but I can't guarantee it will be anything major. Hamtaro and Bijou _are_ the stars of this story after all. I'm also not a fan of music in fics, but I guess while I was writing the last chapter I was going through a surge of hormones or somethingâ€¦I kept listening to that song, though, and it really affected me for some unknown reason. I decided to incorporate it since it made a good intro for Hamtaro and Bijou's conversation (the bulk of which occurred during this chapter). And _yes_, I know exactly what I said: the climax of this story, the first part at least, is coming soon.

Even though the first thirteen chapters were the introduction, the climax is approaching. Just trust me! Hamtaro and Bijou, well, they might get together, or they may not, but you'll just have to keep reading to find out!

****Wishbone the Lover of Books-***Well you didn't have to wait too long this time! I'm glad you liked the last chapter and I hope you liked this one as well! Thanks for the review!

And as always, reviews are most appreciated.

-CN

19. Silver Lining

So sorry for the incredibly late update! To say that things have been hectic in my life would be an extreme understatement, but let's just leave it at that for now! First, go read the chapter!

****CN****

****Petals****

****Chapter Nineteen: *_Silver Lining_***

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"And so," Bijou sighed before she leaned back into the recliner, eyes closed with a sort of tired frustration and anxiety as her hair bunched across her face, "apparently he's an heir."

Sandy and Pashmina almost did a double-take. Giving each other a fast glance, they quickly looked back at their friend.

"Like, you can't be serious."

"He always made fun of you for being an heiress!" Pashmina cried indignantly. "He has some nerve."

"I know, I know," the French girl rolled her eyes to the ceiling and let her head tilt back for a few seconds. She kept her head in that position as she continued to speak.

"But he claims to be an heir on a smaller scale. He's not going to inherit some big company in a few months, so that makes us worlds apart." As she finished, she shifted her head so that she was currently looking at her two best friends. The girl shrugged.

"I'm guessing the house you two are supposed to move into was something he inherited, right?" Pashmina asked, already shaking her

head. "Men are so pigheaded."

Bijou nodded. She looked at Sandy.

"Have you asked Maxwell about moving in here when I leave?"

In response, Sandy blushed and looked to the side. "He said he'd think about it."

"Cats, _that_ won't make me the third wheel," Pashmina replied sarcastically. "I guess I better start looking for another place to live while I still can."

"That's not necessary," Sandy reminded quickly.

"But I'm sure either Dexter or Howdy will be thrilled to take you up on that offer, should you ever need it, of course," Bijou joked.

"Ughh, why'd you remind me of them, Bij?" Pashmina groaned and leaned over the armrest of the sofa.

"How sad is it that those two can actually be considered two of the most prominent men in my life?" she wailed as she buried her face into her hands.

"There, there, Pashy," Sandy soothed as she placed a gentle hand on the girl's back. "They're not so bad. Maybe you should give one of them a chance, because I really don't think they'll ever stop."

At this, Pashmina let out an ever more desperate cry.

All the while, despite the strenuous circumstances surrounding her marital life, a small smile had come onto Bijou's face. It was like a kid thinking about a secret only he knew about it, which is precisely why the little bit of joy showing up on Bijou's face immediately caught Sandy's attention.

"What's so funny?"

Instantly, deep emerald eyes met with brilliant, lime-green ones. Just as quickly, however, Bijou let out an all-too-forced sigh and shrugged again. It was too obvious for Sandy, a performer, that Bijou was now trying to re-create an aura of gloom and doom around herself.

"Nothingâ€¦I was just remembering my life before I ruined it and let an effervescent and transparent drink trash the dignity I had worked so hard to uphold." She even pulled out a tissue from a nearby tissue box and dabbed her eyes. She threw a couple of sniffles in there as well. Despite her own problems with the male gender, even Pashmina looked up at the girl's incredibly excessive act.

"Alright, since you decided to prove performing arts aren't your forte instead of telling the truthâ€¦I'm guessing you're smiling about something Roger said to you today when you visited him?" Sandy mused, staring her white-haired friend down.

One could hear a pindrop.

"How'd you know I visited him today?" Bijou asked, all signs of weariness and sadness long gone from her voice.

"Your husband remember him?" was a little distraught about why you didn't let him visit Roger. He apparently told Stan, and Stan texted me," Sandy explained. She looked at Bijou as if she were a parent criticizing their child for doing something "bad".

"You're implying that I was somehow unfaithful to Hamtaro?" The stern look on Bijou's face lasted for all but a second before an amused smile came on.

"Ha! Sandy, please. Even though I don't have an ounce of feeling for him, I still have to make it look like I'm in love with him for the next six months."

"You only have to make it look like you're in love to most of the world. Who you put in that minority that knows the truth behind your marriage is all up to you," the strawberry-blond reminded.

Pale white fingers gripped the ends of the recliner's armrest. Biting her lip, Bijou pushed herself off the plush seat.

"Sandy, believe what you want. I'm going to take a shower."

As the European Ham-Human sauntered down the hallway, Sandy put her hand under her chin and found herself falling into a state of deep-thought, something the free-spirited dancer didn't like to do very often.

"Did you buy that?" Pashmina's voice was quiet, careful to not go high enough so that Bijou would hear.

"Not for a second," Sandy replied. She tapped a finger against the bottom of her face for a moment.

"Well, it might not be all bad. Bijou likes Roger a lot, and from what I heard, Roger really likes Bijou," Pashmina explained as she ran a hand through her hair.

"But," Sandy started, looking over and catching her friend's eye.

"But," Pashmina repeated, already knowing exactly where Sandy was going.

"What if someone else already likes Bijou?"

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Donning her white bathrobe, Bijou fell supine onto her bed. For a good few moments, all she could think about were two very different men.

Yes, she felt guilty. She and Hamtaro had promised each other not to let anyone outside their close group of friends namely their roommates and a few others like Panda, Dexter and Howdy know. But Bijou knew that whatever she had budding with Roger was more than a

little crush. She had been in enough relationships to know that this had the potential to be something big, and though it might've been slightly selfish, she wasn't about to risk it.

A blush came across her face as she realized she hadn't been wrong, something Roger had proven to her this afternoon.

She turned on her side and then pushed herself up.

"What he doesn't know what hurt him," she said to herself, assured that keeping the secret from her husband would be well worth it.

She got off the bed and walked into the hallway. She still had that shower to take, after allâ€¦

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"_Six months, and then it'll all be over, right?" It was cute how desperately he wanted Bijou to tell him he was correct once again._

_Bijou smiled as she opened the door to his office. She pushed a strand of snowy white hair behind her lovely face. _

"_Six months, and then I'll be free to be with whomever I want," she answered cheerfully before giving the man one last smile and leaving the botanical gardens._

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"You can't possibly think that getting married in the next two weeks is a good ideaâ€¦"or even possible!"

"You should pay more attention to your driving than on what my mother desires. That's the third person that's honked at you since we left," Bijou reminded, briefly looking up from her manicured nails for a moment.

"Well if your mother hadn't scheduled a meeting with this wedding planner during rush hour, maybe traffic wouldn't be so nasty," Hamtaro reminded as he quickly put his foot on the break, noticing the car in front of him stopping quickly.

"I already told you that we were ridiculously lucky to get a meeting in at such incredibly short notice," Bijou reminded as she pulled out a compact from her bag and glanced over her makeup.

"Komachi is a very talented wedding planner. She does work in Asia, Europe, and even some for royalty in Africa," the girl finished as she snapped her compact close.

"Is that why her headquarters is located in the worst part of town?" Hamtaro pointed out, indicating the abandoned, rundown tenements and empty warehouses that surrounded them.

"She doesn't like to do flashy, and she's not into office settings,"

Bijou said as she placed a hand over her temples. "I've been to some of the weddings she put together, and I have the most absolute faith in her abilities."

"Huh. You're certainly in a better mood today. Ever since we came back from Kyoto, you've been throwing yourself pity parties over the mistake we made," the orange-and-white-haired Ham-Human explained as he turned a corner.

"I just try and find a silver lining in everything," the girl beamed, putting on a 100-watt smile.

"Since when?!" Hamtaro gave her a sharp look before looking back at the road.

"Since always," Bijou replied, almost sounding a bit surprised.

"You are no optimist, Bijou." At this, Bijou shrugged innocently, something Hamtaro noted from the corner of his eye.

"And exactly what silver lining did you find, anyway?"

"I told you," the French woman was suddenly looking down to the other side, sighing as she ran a hand through her white locks. "My mother won't make me take over the company after we get a divorceâ€|she'll think I'm unstable or somethingâ€|"

Perhaps for those who knew Bijou Ribon Haruna fleetingly, that lie would've worked. She had been working on her fibbing skills since Sandy saw so easily through them the other night. Hamtaro, however, was not having any of it.

"That's not why you're so content right now." He said it as a fact, completely assured. He even kept his eyes straight on the road ahead of him, not needing to know her facial expression because he knew for a fact he was right.

Bijou looked at him, annoyed. How was it that everyone was suddenly figuring out when she wasn't telling the truth? She wasn't that bad of a liar before.

"You were there when I realized how being your wife, and the aftermath of our divorce, would hinder me from taking over the company. How can I be lying?" her voice was flat, still showing signs of annoyance.

"Because despite that, you've still been sadâ€|you don't have to deny it. Today, it suddenly went away." The man looked over at her for one second.

"I'd just like to know what made you so happyâ€|"

It was bittersweet for the French girl at that moment. On the one hand, he was proving, yet again, that he could understand her and see the little things that she did. It was nice and sort of comforting all at once to know that someone in the world could read her like that. On the other hand, she felt vulnerable and much too open, and perhaps just a little worried that the one reading her was him.

For this very reason, the girl, feeling her mouth dry up, quickly turned her head to look at the outside scenery (or lack thereof since they were currently driving through the warehouse district).

"It was nothing you did, so you don't have to worry."

Hamtaro felt his jaw locked. Did she really think saying something like that would make him feel better? What's worse was that, just a few short weeks ago, that would have made him feel better, or at least not have had this negative effect on him at all. So before Bijou had the chance to notice his muscles suddenly tensing, he feigned a smile and kept two all-too-sturdy eyes set on the alley he was about to turn into.

"Heh, I didn't think so."

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Hamtaro tilted his head to the side, giving the giant warehouse a seventh look-over. It didn't help, though, for whichever way he stared at it, a giant, abandoned-looking warehouse was still a giant, abandoned-looking warehouse, regardless of the angle.

"You look like a deer in headlights," his wife said impatiently, already standing at the door of the warehouse. She was tapping her foot impatiently against the worn-and-torn pavement of the roadâ€|err, or perhaps alley was the better word?...

"This is a joke, right? Or maybe your mother got the address of the wedding planner confused with the dump?" he asked cautiously as he made his way over to Bijou. Just as he was reaching for the handle of the massive, rusty door, the French girl slapped his hand away.

"You can't just enter Komachi's office without even telling her you're here," she explained, shaking her head in embarrassment that her husband didn't even know that much etiquette. She then pressed a doorbell that was so rusty and barely attached to the building by a thin little wire that Hamtaro didn't even notice it at first.

Just a few seconds after she pressed the bell, a surprisingly crystal clear voice came out over a speaker box located a few feet over the bell (something that, once again, Hamtaro didn't notice due to its rust-covered appearance).

"Yes?" the somewhat annoyed-sounding voice on the box asked.

"Yes, hello, I am Bijou Haruna and I'm here with my husband Hamtaro Haruna. We have a 9:30 appointment with Ms. Komachi," Bijou said excitedly, smoothing out her skirt a little as she did so. Hamtaro didn't understand why she looked so willing about entering such a filthy place, but he didn't get half the things she did, so he let it slide.

"Alright, please hold while I check with her," the voice responded. After a second, there was a soft "click" heard over the speaker box, indicating that they had been put on hold.

"Huh, who knew this place had electricity," Hamtaro observed,

impressed. "Could've fooled me."

"Komachi doesn't like flashy, but that doesn't mean she prefers barbaric." Bijou rolled her eyes. "It is so like you to be so narrow-minded."

Hamtaro had just about had it at this pointâ€|

"We are up the street from the Red Light District, I don't have enough fingers on my hands to count the number of drug dealers and addicts we passed on the way here, and your amazing, incredibly-hard-to-reserve wedding planner's headquarter is in this gigantic, rundown warehouse. Excuse me if I feel a little suspicious." His arms were flailing maddeningly, for his wife was once again observing her manicure rather than paying attention to him.

"Would you stop making so much noise? It's embarrassing," Bijou finished, completely unfazed by Hamtaro's outburst. A moment before the Japanese male would have had a brain hemorrhage, the voice on the speaker box came back.

"Welcome, Mrs. Haruna. You and your husband can come in now," the female voice said before another click was heard. Hamtaro moved forward to open the rusty door, but before he knew it, a sound much like an elevator moving up and down was heard and the door started sliding open all by itself.

What he expected to see inside were a few tables, most likely filled with color swatches and magazines of possible reception venues. Maybe even a microphone on a table that connected to the speaker box outside. Nothing too elaborate, because, come on: Look at the place.

However, as the sliding door slowly started to reveal more and more of what exactly went on within Komachi's warehouse, a whole new feeling took over.

Instead of the rustic, practically abandoned building he figured he would be lead into, what he saw was more like a bustling city. The 60-foot walls were all covered in a light, pastel green. The warehouse seemed to be divided into sections, covered off by curtains that looked more appropriate for a doctor's office. These sections included a food tasting bar, a dinnerware selection corner, a massive portion dedicated to color selection, a flower ordering partition that looked like it took up nearly a fourth of the building, and so, so much more. People dressed very professional business suits were moving to-and-from each part of the warehouse, either carrying several brochures in their hands, animatedly talking to someone on a headset cell phone, carrying an obscenely large centerpiece of some of the most beautiful and exotic flowers he had ever seen, or all three. All the way in the back of the warehouse, which easily looked long enough to fit a jumbo jet, Hamtaro saw nearly fifteen stainless steel ovens, stovetops and sinks, with several workers dressed in chef's apparel moving quickly throughout the area.

"Whatâ€|?" Hamtaro barely choked out, dumbly taking a step into the massive building, still not believing what he saw.

"Mr. and Mrs. Haruna, welcome!" came a new, fresh voice. Bijou didn't

seem startled in the least bit, however, as she nodded to the young woman who had greeted them at the warehouse's entrance.

"Ms. Komachi was very excited to hear that you wanted her services," the young woman added, addressing Bijou with a quick tilt of her brunette head. She had a microphone attached to her head, and a giant walkie-talkie belted across the top of her well-tailored skirt. She looked to be an important person.

"I'd choose none other for my wedding, of course," Bijou agreed with a smile.

"Your husband certainly seems impressed with the facility," the woman noted. Hamtaro's mouth was still on the ground, just staring at what he saw within the warehouse.

"It doesn't take much to have that impression on him," the French Ham-Human sighed, putting a hand on her temples.

"Please, follow me. I'll take you straight to Ms. Komachi's office." With a quick gesture to come after her, the brunette turned on her heel and lead them into the warehouse. Bijou had to pull Hamtaro by the elbow to get him to stop looking like someone had just slapped him in the face and follow, all the while cursing out her luck.

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The brunette took the newlyweds to a corner of the warehouse, adjacent to mammoth kitchen. Another hospital-like curtain separated the office, which had 'KOMACHI' hand painted on it with big black letters, from the rest of the building. Hamtaro could hear yelling on the other side of the curtain, but a quick look at the calm Bijou told him that that was to be expected.

The assistant gently pulled a corner of the curtain aside, looking in. Hamtaro didn't hear her say anything, but the next thing he knew, he and Bijou were being ushered in by the assistant into the office.

"She'll be with you as soon as she's off the phone," the brunette told them as she motioned for them to sit down across the desk from the woman on the phone, who Hamtaro figured was Komachi. Though, for a wedding planner as successful as she was, she looked rather young.

She had somewhat short, shoulder-length brown hair. She had these vivid, grayish-blue eyes that seemed to be igniting as her phone conversation became more heated. Compared to the rest of her staff, dressed in business attire, she had on a simple blouse and a pair of jeans that were tied with a rope instead of a belt? Hamtaro looked over at Bijou, but once again, she looked completely unfazed.

"I told you, she wanted pink peonies for the reception center pieces, and you sent me Abraham Darby Roses. No, I don't care how much they look alike. I promised her peonies, and you failed me, _failed me. _Now in the name of good business, I expect you give my client a 45 percent discount on her flower bill. What do you mean, 'that's

ridiculous?'. Let me tell you something: What was ridiculous was watching my bride go to a reception with Darby Roses instead of peonies, especially since peonies are out of season and you made her pay a hefty price for them. Well I'll take you to court and when I'm done with you, you won't be able to sell a rose on Valentine's Day, are we clear? Yeah, yeah, I'll have my attorney deal with whatever's left of you in the aftermath. Heh, do you kiss your mother with that mouth?! Now shove off!"

With a startlingly loud click, Komachi hung up the phone, shaking her head.

Placing both her palms on her incredibly shiny aluminum desk, Komachi sighed and pushed herself down into her seat.

"That idiot should know better than to get into an argument with me because I-

"-never stop until you win, of course. A strong mantra for anyone in this field," said the business heiress to the business owner.

"It's been too long, Bijou Ribon," Komachi said with a smile. Hamtaro couldn't believe the woman just screaming on the phone was the one presently conversing with Bijou as happy as a clam. Nothing today was making much sense, so he figured he should stop while he was behind.

"Oh wait," her gray-blue eyes widened as she realized something. She opened up a shiny, silver binder to a four-leaf clover bookmark. As she looked through it, she looked back up at Bijou.

"It's Bijou Haruna nowâ€|" With that said, Komachi looked over to Hamtaro, noticing him for the first time since he came in.

"I suppose congratulations are in order," she continued. However, with Bijou suddenly looking to the side and Hamtaro rolling his eyes, she chose to keep any happy wishes to herself.

"Most people choose to see me before they say their vows," Komachi added, pulling out a metallic clipboard from the top drawer of her desk. "And I am an incredibly busy woman, butâ€|"

She looked over at Bijou and her smile grew.

"â€|anything for my good friend." At the compliment, Bijou was beaming.

"And we of course appreciate it so much that you would pencil us in," the French girl chimed.

"Think of it was my somewhat-belated wedding present to you," Komachi replied. She was now glancing at the clipboard, chewing on the clover-shaped eraser end of the pencil she was writing with.

"Josie called me yesterday, and she gave me the basics of the whole thing. Ceremony within the next two weeks; it's going to be held in a church, a nearby reception venue, white dress, black-tie affair, am I right?" she asked as she looked up.

"Sounds good so far," Bijou agreed.

"That's a completely Western wedding," Hamtaro reminded, looking from Komachi to Bijou. "I didn't know it was going to be held in a church and we'd be wearing tuxes and ball gowns. I thought we were having a traditional, Japanese ceremony!"

Komachi looked at Bijou with a, "Should I tell him or should you?" look on her face. Bijou sighed, probably for the twentieth time that day, and turned to her husband.

"My family does not make light out of weddings. They're usually permanent for us, so we do them as elaborately as possible," she explained.

"My family takes them seriously, too, and since when does elaborate equate to completely European ceremonies?!"

Before Bijou could respond, Komachi cut in.

"Exactly how much of her family have you met, anyway, errâ€¦Hamtaro?" she asked, quickly looking back at her datebook.

"â€¦uhmm," the question left Hamtaro nervously scratching the back of his neck, though he wasn't sure why. "Just her mother so far, reallyâ€¦"

"Well, I've catered and planned seven weddings for the Ribon family, and let me assure you, no matter what part of the world it's in, be it a granite castle in Western Italy, under a Greek pantheon or inside a Chinese's palace's pagoda, this family does tradition. Western tradition. Groom's family on one side, bride's on the other. Designer dresses, tuxedos, exotic flowers, the whole nine yards. The wedding for their heiress," she indicated Bijou with her head, "will not be any different. Now, since you've chosen to get married in this area, a simple-but-elegant church ceremony fits the bill perfectly."

"Simple but elegant," Bijou placed a finger on her lips as she thought. "That sounds perfect, Komachi!"

"I knew you'd like it. I've always thought you wouldn't want something completely over the top like some of the weddings these days!" Komachi rolled her eyes exasperatedly, a sign of some of the more difficult weddings she planned.

"Definitely. I was watching this one show the other night about this wedding that cost about a million dollarsâ€¦"

As Komachi and Bijou trailed off into their own conversation, Hamtaro was left astonished.

"So that's it? No Japanese influence at all, even though that's where we live, where I'm from and where Bijou has spent most of her life?"

At his words, Bijou's eyes softened. "Well, alright, when you put it like thatâ€¦"

Hamtaro waited with baited breath as she finished what she started to sayâ€¦

"We can serve miso soup at the reception," she suggested, beaming once again.

"Ooh, a soup station? Those are really big these days," Komachi said to herself as she scribbled something down on her clipboard.

Hamtaro's palm hit his face as he slouched in his chair, listening to the girls converse about the color of the dinnerwareâ€|

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"That warehouse had to have around eighty employees running around, but I didn't see any cars outside," Hamtaro mused as he and Bijou walked out of the warehouse nearly two hours later.

"I think Komachi actually bought the nearby warehouses and storage buildings and converted them into parking lots," she explained as they made their way to Hamtaro's car.

"You know, my family won't be thrilled at the prospect of a completely French wedding. This won't go over well," Hamtaro hmph-ed.

"Trust me, it's much easier to take things my family's way rather than fighting them on anything. It's all for the best, and Komachi will take care of everything so there's no need to worry."

"The wedding date she choseâ€|it's only ten days away," Hamtaro reminded.

"Are you feeling nervous or something?" Bijou asked, giving him a sideways glance.

"Not really, but that means we miss at least ten days of work and school." He didn't seem happy about it, but Bijou merely shrugged.

"Well, we're not going on a honeymoon or anything, so it could've been worse. We can makeup exams, even that chemistry midterm we have to retakeâ€|and Roger understood when I told him yesterday."

Bijou immediately stopped talking and looked to the side, almost ashamed of bringing him up in front of her husband.

"What exactly did he say, anyway, when you said we'd be out for two weeks?" Hamtaro asked, somewhat suspiciously, as they got to his car. Bijou went to the passenger side door, and Hamtaro did likewise to the driver's side, never taking his eyes off his bride.

"You know, he just said to consider it like an unpaid vacation. Nothing major," she mumbled as she got into the car.

"And that's all you talked about yesterday?" Hamtaro asked casually as he buckled his seatbelt.

"What's with the twenty questions? It was just a meeting with our

bossâ€| " But Bijou did not or could not look him in the eyes, and so Hamtaro pressed further.

"You didn't let me come to the meeting, and you've told me you have feelings for him, so yes, I think something more went on." Bijou noticed he wasn't starting the car. He was just looking at her, unnerving her.

"I didn't want you to come because this whole situation upsets me. Being with you, telling people my name is Bijou _Haruna_. You told me today that I constantly throw pity-parties for myself, right? Well it's because I'm not happy being your wife, and you know that," she said, with a stressed edge in her voice that cut right through his defenses. "Going to the man I _really_ liked and telling him I'll be marrying someone I used to _really_ hate wasn't going to be easy for me."

"I thought you found yourself a silver lining," Hamtaro said more to himself than to her, as he suddenly started fidgeting with the gears of his car, unable to look at her. But Bijou looked straight at him as he said this.

"I did!" after Bijou noticed the loudness of her voice, she looked away and calmed herself down.

"I _did_. But a silver lining around a cloud only works if the cloud can keep the storm in. Otherwise, it just becomes a big mess." The sound of her voice made it obvious she was ready to burst, just like a storm.

"You were fine a couple of hours ago," her husband reminded.

"But you just keep pushing and bringing up the things that I'd rather leave untouched!" Bijou wasn't sure if this was all the truth of how she feltâ€for she did hate being his wifeâ€or guilt about her and Roger surfacing because Hamtaro wouldn't let that subject go or some sort of combination of both. Either way, she had had enough and didn't want to hear anymore from him, not when he was just determined to push all her buttons.

"Bijou," Hamtaro was left speechless. He wanted to tell her not to cry, or worry, because he'd take care of her and he'd make her happy again, but he knew he couldn't do that. He'd never have the ability to do that.

"Please just drive," she pleaded.

If it would momentarily please her, Hamtaro started fumbling around nervously as he put the key into the ignition. Bijou leaned back into her seat, trying to muffle her whimpers and likewise causing more pain to the man beside her than she had any clue of, as the car drove through the alleys.

Aside from her soft cries, they drove in silence for a few minutes before they heard Bijou's phone ring.

"What?" Bijou snapped, however, as soon as she realized who it was she immediately straightened up her posture and wiped the tears off her face.

"Muzzer!" she choked out, startling Hamtaro. "No, no, I haven't considered where to buy my dress yet. Oh, muzzer, zat'sâ€"that's a good point!"

Bijou returned one of the many "What the Heke is going on?" glances Hamtaro was sending her way.

"We need to make a detour," Bijou said quickly as she returned to speaking with her mother.

Deep, deep in the cockles of his heart, Hamtaro knew this was not going to end with anything he considered positive.

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Pashmina was sitting on the loveseat in her living room, typing away and biting her lip as she thought of the perfect wording for this one particularly complex point she was trying to bring across in her essay. Sandy, meanwhile, was reading a play she had to memorize by the next week and recite the entire first act of.

"Bij is so lucky she doesn't have to go to school," Pashmina muttered as she deleted a sentence she deemed as unsatisfactory.

"Tell me about it," Sandy agreed as she flipped a page in her booklet.

"Well I'm glad you feel that way!"

Pashmina and Sandy visibly jumped from their seats as they saw Bijou walk into the room, hearing the not-too-distant front door slam itself shut. She looked far too happy for the conversation she had just overheard.

"Why are you glad about that?" Sandy asked skeptically. "School is sucking my life out right now!"

Instead of answering, Bijou merely walked over and handed both Sandy and Pashmina an envelope.

"Open them!" she urged excitedly.

"Hmm, Bij, these look likeâ€|" Pashmina couldn't finish what she wanted to say as she read all the information presented on that strip of paper.

"â€|tickets?" Sandy asked, looking from the paper in her hands to Pashmina and then to an all-too-excited Bijou.

Bijou nodded her head like a bobblehead doll that had just been activated.

"YUPP!!!"

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"Guess what guys," Hamtaro cried as he entered his apartment. Seeing only Oxnard and Stan in the living room, he called, "Boss, you might wanna get out here, too."

"_Cats_, dude! The last time you said 'guess what' you ended up telling us you got married. _You_ do not have the right to use that phrase anymore because you only bring bad news with it," Stan scoffed as he took another handful of popcorn from his bowl, conveniently located on top of his textbook.

"Stop being bitter, Stanley, and listen to what he has to say," Boss said as he came into the living room, giving a slap to Stan on the back of his head.

"We're listenin', kid," Boss told Hamtaro.

"Well," Hamtaro started as he took a seat on the recliner, "Bijou's crazy mom decided that none of the dress shops in Japan have the certain type of couture or whatever that a Ribon is worthy of, or some junk like that. And apparently, the tuxedos here suck, too, or at least according to my mother-in-law. So _basically_, we have to go apparel shopping in France," Hamtaro explained, almost sounding as bitter as Stan as he snarled. The sacrifices he had to make for this wedding were becoming a little extreme. He was in no mood to travel to Europe, not when he had to miss school and work to plan for this totally Western wedding.

"Wow, Hamtaro, that's uhhâ€¦certainly something I think we allâ€¦uhhâ€¦needed to hear," Oxnard said hesitantly, not really sure how to comment.

"Tchh, of course. _Yet another_ benefit to getting drunk and married: free vacation!" Stan practically fell over with jealous rage. "I used to believe in Karmaâ€¦not so much anymore, to be totally honest."

"Kid, this is just ridiculous!" Boss exclaimed as he stood up, almost pacing as he walked around to the other side of the living room.

"First that woman decides that you can't go to school until you have an _official_ ceremony. On top of that, she won't let you go to work. Not only are you behind on your academics, but she's making you financially irresponsible as well. Plus who can forget that makeover Bijou made you get? And _now_ you have to fly halfway across the world just to buy a tux?! You're the man in this relationship!! Put your damn foot down!"

"There's more," Hamtaro started as he leaned over and got a soda can from the coffee table.

"I'd like to see what more she could possibly add to her list of ridiculous demands!"

"You guys are in my bridal party." Hamtaro took a sip of his soda. "We need your measurements, and since the tuxes are going to be designed there, it's easier just to have you guys fly out there with me," he explained, tilting his head back and letting his roommates soak all this in.

"On the other hand," Boss admitted, "this is a wonderful opportunity to learn about your wife's culture!"

"HA! I KNEW Karma wouldn't let me down!!! Get ready, France, cuz STAN TORAHAMU IS COMING!!!"

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"This is exactly what we needed, Bij," Sandy toasted as the three girls sat outside in their backyard, surrounding the tiny little fire pit and each donning a blanket to shield them from the autumn night chill.

"I've just heard so many stories from you about your chateau, and then your Parisian loftsâ€¦I just can't wait to see them! And ohhh the shopping!" Pashmina cried, almost unable to keep her joy in as the three girls took a sip of their bubbly drinks from their glasses.

"I'm glad you guys can get some enjoyment out of this," the French girl mused as she put her glass down on the ground and snuggled her blanket closer around her body. "I just hope this impromptu trip doesn't interfere too much with your schoolworkâ€¦"

"Pshheahh!"

"Yeah, right! Like we can compare going to France to college!"

"I suppose," Bijou smiled as she shrugged, looking to the side.

"I might get to see Maxy!" Sandy reminded. "This is like the best thing that's happened to me all semester."

"Aww, what a shame!"

The three girls immediately looked up at each other, knowing that the voice didn't come from either of them. The alarm on their face wasn't because they didn't recognize the voice. In actuality, they recognized it too well.

"Thatâ€¦sounds likeâ€¦" Pashmina trailed off as the three girls looked to the side of their backyard, where the fence connected the front and back of the house.

"I just come back home and you make plans to leave," Sparkle said as she stepped further into the yard. The snarky little smile on her face was unmistakable, as was the odd glimmer that reflected in her eyes from the fire's light.

"_How_ rude!"

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I purposely wrote Bijou as being very distant from Hamtaro this chapter, so I'm hoping that worked well enough! (Looks around hopefully)

And I'm sorry for the lack of updates. I swear I'll try to get at least three more updates out before September, when I must go back to college. I'll try my best not to break my word!

****Anditends-***Lol, yes, Roger isn't that interesting, is he? But to Bijou, he's the gorgeous, smart, sweet boss who's head-over-heels for her, so Hamtaro can bite the dust! xD Thanks for reviewing!

****Lawliet's Angel-***It took me forever to figure out what outfits Hamtaro and Bijou would wear in the last chapter. I was on all these designer websites, looking at the latest fashions and trying to find a timeless look for their outfits so that whenever somebody came across this fic, the look would never be too outdated, you know? And I desperately, desperately hope you liked Komachi in this chapter. I know it's been two-and-a-half years since you first emailed me her description, but I swear every few weeks I'd re-read your email and remind myself of how to write Komachi. I never forgot, and I hope she lived up to your expectations! (If not, tell me, and I'll try to redeem her the next chance I get!) Thanks for reviewing!

****Moonlight-Milkyway-***I don't care much for long reviews if they don't give me something constructive. I write this fic because I love Hamtaro and Bijou together, and I wanted something more complex and never before seen for them, you know? But I also want to improve my writing as I go on, soooo I love criticism, probably more than most authors :D But thanks for reviewing!

****Shadow Bijou-***Hmm, do you have to read "Unfurling", the prequel to "Petals". No. It just helps clarify why Bijou, Sandy and Pashmina live in their own house instead of on campus, why Boss, Stan, Hamtaro and Oxnard also share an off-campus apartment, and why Maxwell goes to school in France instead of Japan. Ohh, plus Sparkle's role in "Petals" is foreshadowed in that fic. But the truth is, my little sisters crashed my home computer (where I had originally written all of "Unfurling"), so I lost the rest of that fic, and am currently too lazy to retype it. Oh, and as for your review, I wouldn't say Bijou only likes Roger for his "face value", and as the coming chapters will show "hint" Roger's feelings for her extend much further than anything aesthetic. But you get to see that as the chapters come along, so thank you for reviewing and I'm sorry for the ridiculous wait in the update :(

So please read and review! Please????

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****Petals****

****Chapter Twenty: **_The Carousel's Melody_**

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For a suspended moment, the only noises heard in that small house's backyard were the cracking of the fire and the distinct sound of high heels strutting against the patio's pavement. And, though each of the three residents had a swarm of thoughts rushing through their minds, at that very instant, they all found their tongues hanging idly in place, not quite sure what to say.

It was the reflection of the firelight in Sparkle's eyes that caused the three girls to stay silenced. At the moment, her entire visage was brimming with the orange afterglow, but the way the flames worked with another, all-too-devious glint in her eyesâ€|There was something _dark_ about this picture. Sandy, Bijou and Pashmina had the knots in their stomachs to prove it.

Her smile made the scene all the more unsettling. The positioning of her eyes, coupled with the grin that was much too wide given the girls' history with the pop singer, made her the hidden cobra that was so ridiculously pleased when an unknowing mouse wandered too far into its territory.

But it would be a warm day in Siberia before Bijou would let Sparkle win this battle of surprises and looks.

"I guess I should congratulate you, Bijou," Sparkle said cheerfully as she crossed her hands over her designer dress.

"What are you doing here?!" the French girl retorted, standing up, before Sparkle could even finish her sentence completely. She had the slightest of pouts on her face, and her emerald eyes were now narrowed to return Sparkle's condescending stare.

"Or _maybe_ I should call you 'Haruna' now, hmm? I was never a big fan of using your first name, and I'm sure your husband would prefer itâ€|" Sparkle mused as she feigned consideration, putting a finger to her chin as she "thought".

"You're trespassing onto my property. Leave before I call the police," Bijou replied sternly. She pulled her blanket tighter over her being, feeling the chilling wind only get stronger over the past few seconds.

"Now, now. There's no need for such empty threats. I _know_ you wouldn't do that to an old friend." Without waiting for Bijou's reply, the girl walked around to the only vacant seat in front of the fire and, with a quick dust of the aforementioned seat, sat herself

down. Directly opposite of Bijou.

"What're you even doing here?" This time it was Bijou's turn to fold her hands over her frame. Her fingers impatiently tapped against the other arm's elbow.

"Well, I was just taking a test drive in my new sports carâ€"custom built for me in Austria, by the wayâ€"around the neighborhood and decided to stop by. Oh, and," she turned to look at Pashmina, "close your mouth, dear. That's not an attractive look for you at all."

Pashmina was furious but nevertheless turned to the side and closed her mouth.

"Alright, so you've stopped by. We, however, are leaving for Europe in two days so we don't exactly have time to catch up on the old days or whatever you actually came here for," Bijou, still standing, started to say. However, Sparkle's sarcastic snorts cut her off.

"Oh _please_! If I wanted to reminisce about any memories I had in this cruddy little town, it certainly wouldn't be with _you_." Sparkle rolled her eyes and crossed her legs. She leaned back on her hands and started to relax.

"Like, do you need us to spell it out for you? _We_ don't want _you_ here," Sandy said slowly, gesturing to herself and then to Sparkle.

"_Like_, I've heard middle-schoolers speak more maturely than you, Soapy," Sparkle snipped, not bothering to look up as she examined her manicure.

"It's Sandy," the strawberry-blonde fumed.

"Oh, I know. I was just calling you 'Soapy' in reference to your washed-up singing career. Wait, that's not true."

Sparkle looked at Sandy with a stare sugary enough to induce diabetes.

"To have a washed-up singing career, you first need to _have_ a singing career."

Bijou, being closest to Sandy, practically had to lunge in order to block Sandy from ripping the brunette's hair out. Sparkle, meanwhile, sighed and checked her makeup in her compact. Despite El Sandy: The Raging Bull being ready to rip her fake eyelashes off if it wasn't for Bijou, Sparkle was and looked quite bored. This just infuriated Sandy all the more.

"If you had something to say, I suggest you say it and be on your way. The three of us were just fine enjoying this night by _ourselves_,\" Pashmina reiterated.

"Well, far be it from me to overstay my welcome." She looked over at Bijou, still restraining Sandy, as she stood.

"Please tell your husband I'll be stopping by to give him his wedding present soon."

"Am I his keeper? Tell him yourself!" Bijou snapped. Sandy had calmed down somewhat at this point, leaving Bijou to indignantly cross her hands over herself yet again, her eyes narrowing in a way usually only reserved for Hamtaro.

"You sort of are his keeper. You're his wife, after all! Though I always thought I'd get married before you. But I suppose when you're smashed enough, anything's possible!" Sparkle seemed to laugh at the joke that only she found humorous.

Before Bijou could lie and tell Sparkle that her wedding to Hamtaro was not induced by alcohol in anyway, Sparkle put her hand up in front of herself.

"Relax, I'm leaving. I'll see you soon, and do remember to pass along my message. Now ta-ta!" she called over her shoulder as her heels once again made that distinctive sound against the concrete portion of the backyard.

And also once again, that little area had become void of any noise except for the fire whipping and cracking its flames as high as it could into the otherwise black atmosphere.

The three girls were now standing around the fire pit, and Bijou, getting tired of looking at the red and orange-gleam, picked up a nearby bucket and threw its watery contents onto the flames.

The fire went out immediately, hissing like a cobra that had just attacked its rodent prey.

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The next day, or night better yet, around midnight, Bijou shot up from her peaceful slumber, a thought hitting her like a hailstorm of bricks.

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Meanwhile, the four residents of Hamtaro's apartment were all currently passed out in the living room. Seeing as how they were leaving for France the next morning, the young men had decided that the past day or so was better spent playing video games and eating enough junk food to make them sick.

Being in the "sensitive" state that he was, when the phone started ringing just past midnight, Hamtaro, being closest to the phone, groaned; the phone's ring was amplified about five fold in his current condition. He let it ring, turning over on the couch and seeing no need to pick it up. Then it rang another time. He let that one go, as well. However, when the phone started ringing for the third time, he figured he would humor whoever was on the other line and explain that he had an incredibly important flight in the morning.

Because he was mindlessly reaching out, he didn't realize he pressed the 'speaker' button when he answered the phone.

"Helloâ€|?" he slurred into the phone as he put the receiver up to his mouth.

"I hope I didn't wake you." The annoyed, and on-speaker-ridiculously-loud voice of his wife, immediately caused Hamtaro to sit up, suddenly incredibly nervous at her tone. The three other boys in the room, hearing a female's voice, also looked up from their slumber.

"Issatbijooou?" Stan asked as he appeared from somewhere on the other side of the couch, looking over as rubbed his tired eyes.

"You didn't wake me." Though Hamtaro had to clear his voice to get the grogginess out of it.

"I'm sure. I'm also sure that all four of you packed your bags by now since our flight leaves at 10:30 a.mâ€|Am I right?"

Oxnard, Boss, Stan and Hamtaro wordlessly looked at each other. They knew that had forgotten something!

"Ofâ€|of course you are!" Hamtaro quickly gestured to his roommates to get moving.

"Because, if you weren't ready and were planning on saving the packing for tomorrow morning, like you did when we went to Kyoto, and you ended up being lateâ€|well, then I'd just realize you weren't taking this seriously, and if I thought that, I'd also think that the best choice would be to tell our families of your ridiculous plan to pretend to be a couple for six months, and then I'd think to leave you to deal with the outcome since you were so adamant on this to begin with!"

As her words came out, they just got louder and louder and had more edge to them with every passing second. The force and enunciation she had with every syllable spoken made the four men realize that she was in no mood for games or any sort of foolishness. Hamtaro visibly gulped.

"Sooo, there won't be a repeat of Kyoto, right?" Bijou asked in a saccharine voice.

"You have nothing to worry about," Hamtaro told her as he quickly hopped off the couch.

"I'm sure. Alright then, good night!" with a swift click, the sound of a phone hanging up was echoed throughout the small living room.

Boss and Stan looked at Hamtaro sympathetically. Normally they'd laugh at how "whipped" Hamtaro was, but hearing Bijou just now, they felt for the poor boy for having to deal with that for the next few months.

"Cats," Oxnard said as hesitantly walked into his room, in quest of a suitcase, "she made Pepper's temper seem like a gentle breeze."

"That voice made Sandy sound tame, and trust me, when that bull gets riled upâ€|" Stan trailed off, shuddering.

"She was really upset when I nearly caused us to miss the flight to Kyoto," Hamtaro mused with his back turned to the rest of the guys. As he put the phone receiver down into his proper charger, he said with a much softer and lower voice, "I don't want to do that to her again."

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With an apple, a granola bar, a handful of sunflower seeds and a toothbrush in their mouths, respectively, Hamtaro, Boss, Oxnard and Stan walked into the lobby of their apartment building.

"The lobby clock says we're about two hours early for our flight," Oxnard noticed, whining slightly, as he swallowed his mouthful of seeds.

"Right, but my wife demanded we get to the airport soon, so we really don't have a choice," Hamtaro reminded, leading the pack as they rolled their suitcases and carried their bags across the room's tiled floor.

"Wow, you actually listened," Bijou said, clapping her hands in an appeasing applause, somewhere from the boys' right. Almost robotically, they turned their heads in the direction of her voice.

She was standing up with Pashmina and Sandy on either side of her; the trio of girls had apparently been watching them this whole time, hidden in the darker parts of the room to avoid being noticed.

"Were you testing us?" Stan asked indignantly, pointing his toothbrush at his twin.

"We weren't planning on it. We had hoped to simply meet you guys at the airport like we planned, but then I remembered that we had you to deal with, Stanley, so we didn't wanna take any chances." Sandy shrugged.

"You should trust us more often," Hamtaro reminded, puffing out his chest all macho-like.

"Hmmâ€¦where are your tickets?" Bijou asked as she realized none of the men before her had anything resembling an envelope and/or tickets on their persons.

It was almost as if a clock started ticking the moment she asked that question. The four of them, realizing at the same time that a little "ding!" went off in their heads, quickly glanced at each other.

"Hey, Oxy, I think I left my keys on the kitchen counter," Boss said, rubbing his neck nervously. "Mind getting them for me?"

"You did not," Oxnard countered as he pointed to Boss's jeans. "I can see the outline of your keys in your pant pocket."

"Thoseâ€|ummmâ€|aren't my keysâ€|"

"Sure they are, Boss, just check."

"Why don't you go check to make sure they're not upstairs."

"I don't see what the point is when they're right there in your pocket."

"OXY!"

"Ok, fine. Geez, Boss, no need to yell." Oxnard hesitantly turned around and made his way out of the lobby. However, he looked back once to tell the other men in the lobby, "But while I'm up there, I'm gonna go get the tickets."

The three facepalms heard after he said that were only overshadowed by the three smirks on the girls' faces.

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"I was meaning to ask you about these tickets, Bijou," Boss said, frustratedly grabbing his ticket out of Oxnard's hand.

"What about them?" the heiress mused.

"They don't have any travel agency name on them, or what airline we'll be using. All it gives are a gate name and time, really," Boss explained as he held out his ticket to the girl.

"Ohh, that's because whenever Bijou travels to France, she uses a chartered private jet, not a commercial airline," Pashmina enlightened, earning a nod of the head from Bijou.

"It's first class, too," Sandy added.

Before any of the men, all astounded and once again looking at each other to see if either of them knew any of this, the very familiar sound of the apartment building's front door being opened rang through the lobby, carrying with it a swift, autumn wind.

"Only France, huh? I get a private jet wherever I go," Sparkle explained as she sauntered into the room.

While the girls groaned and rolled their eyesâ€"and with a, "What're you doing here?!" from Sandyâ€"the four men looked excited. Ignoring the female whining, they formed a mini semi-circle around the singing sensation.

"Sparkle?! When did you come back?" Hamtaro exclaimed, eliciting nods and other curious questions from the other male Ham-Humans.

"Just a couple of days ago, actually," the girl replied, looking at Bijou's annoyed expression out of the corner of her eye.

"But you, Mister," she teased as she playfully hit Hamtaro's shoulder, "have been awfully busy. I had no idea you were in such a rush to settle down and get married. You haven't even finished school yet! I better get an invitation to the ceremony," she pouted.

"Ha, of course you will," Hamtaro agreed, almost like a hot butter in her hands.

"Yeah, we'll see about that," Bijou mumbled low enough so that only the two girls around her would hear.

Giving Bijou a slight look once again, Sparkle lowered her voice seductively and wrapped her hands around the orange-and-white-haired Ham-Human's neck.

"But what I really wanted to do before you left for France was give you your wedding gift," she whispered, though it was loud enough for all seven other Ham-Humans to hear.

Bijou raised her eyebrows curiously. Certainly, this looks interesting

"Oh?" Hamtaro replied, though his cheeks were starting to heat up and his voice came out just a tad higher than normal.

"Mhmm" and without warning, one of Sparkle's hands immediately moved down to Hamtaro's collar, pulling his face close to hers. In a millisecond, his lips were attached onto hers, and she more-than-happily moved her hands around his neck once again.

Hamtaro wasn't rejecting Sparkle, and the sucking?...sounds Sparkle was making made it look like she was thoroughly enjoying this.

Five pairs of eyes suddenly had pupils the size of pinheads. These same five sets of eyes immediately turned to Bijou, who looked like she couldn't care less as she patiently crossed her hands over her chest.

"He just keeps getting more and more benefits from all this," Stan said helplessly, looking at the duo locking lips.

"Uhh...is this gonna end anytime soon?" Oxnard asked.

"B-Bij!" Sandy cried, watching in horror as the kiss only deepened. For Sandy, the French girl's indifference was almost astounding. Her twin, however, let out a catcall as the scene further unfolded.

After a good forty-five seconds, Sparkle, pulled away, her cheeks rosy and her breathing deep. Hamtaro practically stumbled backwards, his face aflame.

"Have fun in France," Sparkle wished, sending a wink and blowing a kiss to Hamtaro. She turned on her heel and once again sauntered away, once again letting in a chilly wind as she opened the apartment's door.

"Did you enjoy that?" Bijou finally asked, coming behind the still-in shock Hamtaro.

"Iâ€uhh" Hamtaro looked at his wife, and a little piece inside him sprung to see that she looked neither disappointed nor unhappy. She looked very calm, and for the life of him, he couldn't figure out why that suddenly made him don a frown on his face.

"I'm, ummâ€|sorry?" he suggested, not really sure why.

"Don't be," Bijou said as she shrugged. "I've always thought you two would make a cute couple. You, oddly enough, seem to enjoy each other's company."

She honestly didn't seem ruffled one bit. This, somehow, didn't just affect Hamtaro. Boss suddenly felt for his orange-haired friend, and though Sandy and Pashmina couldn't quite place their fingers on it, something about this didn't seem right.

"Ok, now we've stalled enough. We need to get going!" Bijou ordered, ushering the men to follow her as she started making her way to the lobby's doorsâ€|

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"I can't believe I packed my digital camera in my suitcase!" Pashmina wailed, ogling the rich, green, French scenery all around her. Her nose was practically glued to the limo's window as her eyes looked at all that was around her but so untouchable, like a kid in a candy store who had no money.

"Well that was a smart move, Pashy," Sandy replied from the other side of the limo after yet another picture was taken on her digital camera. "But don't worryâ€|"I'll email you all these later."

Pashmina slouched a bit, still disappointed that she couldn't take any pictures herself, but nevertheless sighed a grateful, "Fineâ€|"

"I don't see what the big deal is," Bijou said, getting the attention of the other Ham-Humans in the vehicle. She seemed confused about why everyone seemed so entranced with hills and grass.

"You don't see foliage like this in Japan," Hamtaro reminded, once again looking out to the gorgeous chaparral that surrounded the dirt road they were travelling on. He looked at his wife, looking somewhat bored, as she sat beside him. She mumbled out a barely audible "I supposeâ€|" before looking tiredly out of the window next to her.

"Bijou, you said that the plane hangar was only a twenty minute drive from your house, but we've been in the limo for over almost forty minutes," Boss reminded.

In response, the girl smiled innocently as a sweatdrop appeared on her head.

"Maybe I should've been more specific: My property is about twenty minutes away from the hangar. The truth is, we've been driving on Ribon property for the past fifteen minutes," she explained sheepishly.

Once again, it became very quiet all around her. Everyone took in this news differently. The boys mostly wanted to kill Hamtaro and marry Bijou in his placeâ€|"with Hamtaro feeling pretty intimidated by

his wife's assets all the while"and Sandy and Pashmina pretty much wanted to kill Bijou for her insane wealth.

"Oh, look!" Bijou said nervously, trying to get the attention as far away from her as possible, "I think I can see the chateau!"

With all other thoughts forgotten, six Ham-Humans immediately turned whichever way was possible in order for them to get the best view (that included Stan poking his head out the sunroof).

Bijou closed her eyes and sighed again, expecting the reactions that came next.

"What is that?!"

"You're|you...you _own_ that?!"

"That's a city, not a house!"

"Bij, like, I don't wanna leave! Lemme stay in France!! I can be your family's heiress!"

"I changed my mind! I don't wanna get a divorce!"

At this comment from Hamtaro, Bijou groaned and pushed him off of her (he was currently leaning over her to get a better look out of the window).

What they saw"from a slight distance, though they were still close enough to be astonished"was a massive home, easily the size of three city blocks. It rest atop a flattened hill, with a massive, light gray stone wall surrounding it. The entrance was adorned with black, iron gates that had golden embellishments on top of each of the gate's spikes.

The chateau was crafted of light pink brick. It had a fountain on its front right side, spurting water a good thirty-five feet into the air. It had beautiful trees surrounding it, and from what the Ham-Humans could tell as the limo pulled up to the gates, the greenery continued into the incredibly spacious backyard.

Bijou, not nearly as excited as the other occupants in the limo, quickly opened the door of the door. Simultaneously, the two black gates"with a beautiful "R" etched in gold on them"were opened by two gates men dressed in uniform.

"_Bonjour, Mademoiselle Bijou_," they said at the same time, bowing ever-so-slightly at their young mistress. The heiress nodded in response.

Then, just as the rest of the Ham-Humans recovered enough to get out of the limo, the gates men brought out two golden luggage carts, which they promptly started to load with the suitcases jammed in the back of the limo and in certain parts of the front (it was next to impossible to get six peoples' bags into the trunk alone).

Bijou yawned as she watched her companions come beside her, single file.

"We spent fourteen hours on a flight today," she reminded as they all

stood next to her, though she had a feeling they were too interested in the aesthetics of the mansion to be paying attention to a word she said. "Let's get some sleep tonight, and then tomorrow we can go to Paris and get some shopping done."

At this, Sandy suddenly took her digital camera away from her face and looked at Bijou.

"Paris? That's where Sorbonne is, right?" she asked, making sure.

For the first time that day, the French girl truly looked astonished. With her mouth slightly open, she could only look at Sandy as this bitter, unwanted feeling wormed its way into her mind.

Hamtaro seemed to be the only one to notice this hesitation. It only took one, quick glance at the girl before he realized what was going on.

"Yup," Pashmina chimed in, beaming at Sandy. "If we get our shopping done early, maybe you'll be able to see him?" she suggested, looking at Bijou hopefully to see if it was ok.

But Bijou still remained speechless, unable to do anything except stare at her friends.

"Don't worry about it, Pashy," Sandy explained, suddenly slouching. The rest of the Ham-Humans suddenly picked up on the strawberry-blonde's melancholy disposition.

"Everything alright, sis?" Stan asked worriedly.

"It's fine," Sandy said, though her eyes were brimming with tears. "But I talked to Maxy on the phone yesterdayâ€¦" she suddenly looked down, "and he has these killer midterms to finish up this week. I didn't tell him I was coming to France, because I wanted to surprise him, you know? But he told me he'd have no time to leave the library these days because his tests are really hard, so I probably won't even see him."

"Oh, Sandy," Pashmina exclaimed as she hugged her friend. Sandy let a few tears fall from her brilliant eyes as Stan patted her on the back.

Once again, Bijou remained speechless. She couldn't seem to focus, so she quickly looked away from Sandy, unable to take this feeling inside of her. This was something her husband, just a foot away, noticed but stayed silent about.

Just as she turned away, a gust of wind swept the group of seven Ham-Humans. Luckily, Bijou had told them a few days ago to dress in layers for the flight due to the steep weather France was experiencing. So as they faced the chill, Bijou meekly turned around to the group and smiled, despite feeling disgusting.

"Let's go," she said quietly, just enough to be heard over the wind, as the luggage carts started being pulled into the mansion.

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"The inside of this house reminds me of a sunflower seed," Oxnard noted as he walked into the grand foyer. It was painted with a light, summer yellow color. The accents, such as the staircase banisters and the squares in the tiled floor, were black. There was a gorgeous staircase descending into the foyer, which branched off at the top of the stairs into the house's two different wings.

"I'm not sure if that's the look the designers were going for, but thank you," Bijou replied, still feigning a smile, as she watched her luggage be removed from the carts. One of the gates men promptly took her bags and started taking them up the staircase.

"_Mademoiselle Bijou!_" a female voice called, stepping out from one of the chateau's many parlors. This middle-aged woman was dressed in a black business skirt and white blouse; she was a part of the staff.

"Genevieve," Bijou replied, nodding her head. The heiress looked back at her little herd and explained.

"Genevieve is the caretaker of the mansion when my family is gone. She'll lead you to the guest wing, which is downstairs. Dinner is normally served at eight," at this she turned to look at Genevieve, quickly asking her a question in French. When the caretaker nodded, Bijou turned back to her friends.

"Right, eight o'clock in the dining room. My mother is currently in Paris doing some office work, and she'll be staying the night in a hotel since our loft there is being fumigated. We'll meet up with her tomorrow! Now go explore your rooms!" Bijou ordered, once again with that fake smile, as her friends nodded at her.

Genevieve quickly took over as Bijou stopped talking. She ushered the rest of the Ham-Humans to follow her as she took them around the staircase and into a separate part of the house.

As soon as they started to leave, Bijou nearly dashed up the staircase. Hamtaro, trailing behind at the end of the group, decided to ditch the little tour and follow. He knew her well enough to know that something was terribly, terribly wrong.

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Hamtaro followed Bijou to a room that was nearly the size of his apartment in Japan. She had left the door of the room open, and he walked in to see her standing at the end of the room, standing on a terrace and looking out the balcony.

Bijou looked out. From this angle, she could see the tree, as beautiful and gorgeous as ever. With a deep breath, she turned around, and for some reason she wasn't all that surprised when she saw her husband watching her curiously from the middle of the room.

"So, you noticed?" she asked, stepping off the terrace. She closed

the French doors that lead onto the balcony behind her.

"What happened?" Hamtaro asked curiously, watching the girl as she walked over to the luggage placed there just a moment earlier.

"You have to ask?" her voice was dull as she touched her suitcase, her eyes lowered.

"Sort ofâ€¦I mean, you're really upsetâ€¦"

"That's the thing! I'm not!" she immediately rebutted, a new sort of passion coming into her emerald eyes. She walked to Hamtaro and wrung her hands, hesitantly looking him in the eyes.

"When Sandy asked about Maxwell, I felt horrible. Justâ€¦really, really bad. I didn't want her to see Maxwell and be happy, especially not when the reason I came to France was to prepare for a wedding I never wanted! And I hated that feeling, but there was nothing I could do to get rid of it. So when she told me that she couldn't see Maxwellâ€¦I was happy. Almost thrilled, really."

Running a hand through her hair, Bijou walked around Hamtaro and sighed.

"I'm horrible. I'm just horrible, aren't I? I'm jealous at my best friend's happiness and excited about her depression." she looked at Hamtaro briefly, not even waiting for his answer.

"No, you're not," he explained. He went to the girl and placed his hands over her shoulders, causing her to look at him sadly. Normally in these sort of situations Bijou would cry, but she was too happy to be sad, which just left her feeling all the more pitiful.

"It's normal to feel this way, though it's probably best not to tell Sandy about this," he noted, looking up to the side for a moment. "Either wayâ€¦it's understandable. It's something you can't have control of, so as long as you don't actually act on these feelings and try to keep Sandy and Maxwell apart, I'm sure you'll get through this."

Bijou rolled her eyes, though her lips were still frowning.

"That's easier said than done," she reminded, "but thank you."

The two stayed together for a few, elongated seconds, enjoying the silence and this new tension that came between them. Suddenly, however, Bijou's face broke into a smile.

"Wow," Hamtaro thought aloud, "you really are happy about this. Maybe you should tell Sandy, after all."

"No, idiot," Bijou retorted, still smiling. She walked around Hamtaro, releasing his hold of her. She walked to the front of the room and turned on the lights, illuminating the area.

"You just reminded me of someone now, that's all," she explained. Hamtaro got his first look at the room as the lights came on.

It really was huge. It had light blue paint all around it, decorated in brilliant white furniture (a vanity, a dresser, a desk and

matching bookcase). As Hamtaro looked up to the ceiling—twenty feet high—he noticed the design of a blue sky with puffy white clouds painted on.

"This was your room when you were little?" Hamtaro asked as his eyes came from the ceiling and fell on Bijou. That's when he realized what Bijou was standing next to. He couldn't believe he missed it the first time he came into the room. In a way, it was so big, it almost blended in, if that made any sense.

"It's my room whenever I come here," Bijou explained, gripping one of the poles of what she was standing next to. "I could never bring myself to want to sleep anywhere else."

Her eyes were fixated on it. Without warning, she took off her shoes and slipped between some of the bars and sat down inside of it, ruffling the crimson sheets as she sat.

"And this is your bed," Hamtaro said, almost speechless as he looked up at the carousel.

"It was my third birthday gift," Bijou beamed, leaning back on her hands and tilting her head upwards.

The carousel bed was stunningly beautiful. Hamtaro decided there were no better words to describe it. It was located in the center of the room, being the obvious centerpiece. Its circular mattress, adorned in red pillows and red sheets, had what looked like a twelve foot radius. It reached up to the top of the ceiling. Its outside was made out of beautiful, white and gold embellishments, crafted in painstaking designs all around. It had seven, white and gold horses suspended on bars that surrounded the circumference of the bed. None of these horses were identical to another, be it their designs on their saddle or the way their manes were braided. Each one looked like it took hours to carve.

Hamtaro couldn't say anything as he carefully touched one of the poles, shocked at the beauty of such a bed.

"Come," Bijou asked, patting the sheets beside her. Though he wasn't sure why, Hamtaro looked around nervously to make sure she wasn't talking to anyone else. Satisfied that he was the only other person in the room, he took off his shoes and maneuvered his way between two of the horses.

When he came next to her, Bijou fully laid down, staring at the ceiling of the carousel. Hamtaro wearily did likewise, though the moment his multicolored head touched the crimson pillows, Bijou sat up, startling Hamtaro.

"I wonder," she said to herself, touching one of her pale fingers to her pink lips. She quickly leaned over to one of the sides of the bed. She found a golden switch and hit it.

"What are you—" But before Hamtaro could finish his question, a note of music rang through the air.

Truly thrilled, Bijou looked back at Hamtaro and gave him a smile so bright that he could feel his heartbeat get louder and louder with each second she stared at him.

"Look!" she cried, pointing randomly at one of the horses.

Hamtaro followed her finger and nearly jumped back in surprise when he saw one of the horses start to move. As he looked around him, he realized all of the horses had started rotating. Some of them even started bobbing up-and-down on their poles. It took a good few minutes, but eventually, the horses had picked up a soft speed and moved rhythmically with the music they played.

"I can't believe it still works," Bijou exclaimed, happily throwing herself back onto the bed. "This thing hasn't been oiled in ages."

"It's amazing, that's for sure," Hamtaro agreed, still looking around him cautiously as he lowered himself down.

They lay there for a minute or so, letting the spinning equines around them soothe them with their rocking and harmony.

"The carousel's melody," Bijou started to say, still intently staring up at the ceiling, "or lullaby, as I'd like to think of it, was at one point the only thing that would put me to sleep."

Hamtaro looked up at the ceiling of the bed for the first time. His eyes widened at the image before him: a man with white hair and emerald eyes holding an infant with the same colored hair and eyes. They were standing in a park, it looked like, with a carousel behind them.

The man's face was the only thing Hamtaro's cobalt eyes could stare at for a moment.

Is thatâ€|?!

Bijou turned to her side. While she loved being in this room, listening to this sound and watching these horses go by, she had to shut her eyes tightly, praying that these memories would go away.

They were memories of a girl but a few years old, lying wrapped like a little red bean in the sheets of the massive carousel bed, constantly tossing and turning because she could not fall asleep. Her sobs were soundless on dry nights, and on rainy nights, she'd let the thunder camouflage her screams.

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I've wanted to write this chapter for about three years. It's one of my favorites from this entire series.

****Crystalgurl101-***Thank you for your warm wishes! I know you said

Sparkle's been growing on you, but I hope she still wasn't _too_ intolerable this chapter. You graduated high school this year, right? Congratulations, and thanks for the review!

****Laidbackguy-****Thanks for the review!!

****Lawliet's Angel-****Lol! I didn't even think of Oxnard being around French food when I thought of how they're going to France. Though, that _does_ give me a good idea of how they go to Paris soonâ€|Thanks for the idea and the review (and I'm really happy you were ok with how Komachi was written! â€"bows with eternal gratitudeâ€")!

****Moonlight-Milkyway-****Well, emotion is what I go for so if I can bring that, then I'm satisfied. Thank you so much for the review!

****Papayas Say That's Kooky-****(I had to read your username about three times before I managed to spell it right :D)Thank you! I go for an element of surprise, so it's nice to see that you like that aspect.

****Sandyandmaxwellfanatic-****Hopefully, you won't kill me for the blatant suspension of any Sandy and Maxwell scenes. They _will_ get their time in the story. In fact, if you want a hint, Bijou's jealousy over the two is a major stepping stone in one of the stories biggest moments. I hope you'll be around to read when that happens, so thank you for the review!

****Shadow Bijou-**** Things are never settled down in my life! Actually, summer's turning out to be busier than college, but oh well. I'm glad you picked up on the distance between Hamtaro and Bijou last chapter. Things looked a bit different after this one, no? heheâ€|Thank you for the review, and enjoy your time off!!

So, will you guys please review? Please?

-CN

21. Light Speckled

Did you guys really not recognize the description of the mansion I gave last chapter? Ahh, wellâ€|it was Maria's (Bijou's owner's) house from the show. See, I kept _some_ things from the show in here!

****CN****

****Petals****

****Chapter Twenty-One: Light-Speckled****

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Hamtaro didn't remember falling asleep, but he woke up to an unmoving carousel and furthermore, to an empty bed. Sitting up quickly, he glanced around Bijou's sky-themed room and realized she wasn't there. His cobalt eyes finally looked over to one of the windows and realized it was close to sunset outside.

With a groan he got himself out of the incredible piece of art that Bijou called a bed and walked into the hallway. He wasn't expecting to run into anyone when the house was so big, so when he heard voices coming from all the way down the hall, he looked up in surprise.

"Do you think that's the tree?" Sandy asked Pashmina as they both leaned to get a good look out the window.

Sandy didn't answer; Stan did.

"No doubt about it, sis," he said as he looked over the two girls, also trying to get a good view of whatever it was the three of them were looking out at.

"What's so special about a tree?" Hamtaro asked, startling the three Ham-Humans who had their backs to him. They all turned around too quickly, showing smiles that were way too frightening to be sincere.

"H-Hamtaro!! Did you just wake up, man? Your voice is a little groggy," Stan attempted to change the subject, but Hamtaro was awake enough to not let that happen.

"Yeah I did actuallyâ€|but why were you guys talking about a tree?" he asked as he cleared his throat. He then tried to see out the window, but all three Ham-Humans took a step forward in their best effort to block him.

"It's just some really, reallyâ€|_big_ tree that Bijou told us about once. And whatdya know! It really _is_ big," Pashmina laughed as she moved her hands in a grandiose manner around her body. "But you should probably get washed up since dinner isâ€|" she checked her watch, "â€|in a couple of hoursâ€|" She finished sheepishly.

"I wanna see the big tree." Hamtaro was more or less testing them, waiting to see how they'd respond. He slowly took yet another step forward, but this time they all cried out in unison.

"NO!!!!"

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Bijou sat with her legs tucked underneath her as she looked up at the only foliage in the massive garden that was made up of one-hundred percent pink flowers. She rubbed some of the petals between her fingers, trying to distract herself from the knots in her stomach and the stinging in her eyes.

"I made a mistake," she said as she peered up at the sky through the rosette branches.

The wind caught her tears and blew them away as she continued looking up.

"I hope you can forgive me!"

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"It's not that special, Hamtaro! Just chill!" Sandy exclaimed, standing with her back pressed against the window and her arms spread out wide so that his view was as obstructed as possible.

"If it's just a really big tree, you guys are acting pretty stupid-" Hamtaro reminded as Stan, once again, attempted to push the man away from the window. The strawberry-blond sidestepped Hamtaro and prevented his way every time the married man took a step.

"We are not; we're simply preventing you from wasting your time. Now I heard that the Ribons have a beautiful kitchen so why don't we go check that out?" Stan suggested while Pashmina nodded much too enthusiastically.

"You guys are definitely hiding something!"

"You're delusional!"

"Why is he delusional?" a new voice asked as she ascended the stairs.

"Bij!" Sandy cried happily. Realizing that she didn't have to guard the window anymore, Sandy, feigning innocence with an extravagant smile, quickly took a step forward.

The white-haired heiress looked quizzically at the four Ham-Humans standing in front of her. Her question was never answered as an entirely new scenario was brought up. She had on a white coat, something she wasn't wearing when she was outside.

"Are you going out?" Hamtaro asked as he stepped towards her (she had yet to move from her spot near the banister), however Bijou held out her hand to tell him that coming towards her was unnecessary.

"Yes, but I should be back by dinner time," she explained, her lips pulled tightly in a smile. She had originally come upstairs to see what all the noise was, and at the moment didn't feel the need or desire to elaborate any further.

Stan, Sandy and Pashmina pretended like they didn't notice the softer timbre of her voice, or how her eyelids were just a little too lowered. By now, they had become used to this even if they didn't like it.

However, Hamtaro picked up on the minute changes and was instantly alarmed. Bijou was already on her way going back down the stairs when she heard his voice.

"Is everything alright?" he asked immediately.

Her emerald eyes turned and locked with Hamtaro's for a second. More than once, her mouth moved as if she were on the verge of saying something, and Hamtaro waited with baited breath at the top of the stairs.

The three others came behind Hamtaro and gave Bijou a reassuring look, letting her know that they could handle this. For a suspended moment in time, Bijou looked past Hamtaro and glanced at Stan's brilliant lime-green eyes, finally realizing what was going on before she arrived.

"All the pre-weeding stress," Bijou started, her eyes moving from Stan to Hamtaro, "and the jetlag—it's a combination of a lot of things," she explained, her voice back to normal and her eyes taking on their usual appearance.

"Do you want me to come with you, wherever you're going?" Hamtaro offered, about to descend the first step.

"I just have to take care of some Ribon-related business. I should be back within the hour," she assured. Leaving no room for debate, she turned on her heel and sped down the grand staircase. The four Ham-humans standing atop the steps saw and heard the front door be opened and then promptly shut.

Hamtaro turned around and looked at the three Ham-Humans who formed a little semi-circle behind his back. The way their startled expressions slowly turned into overtly large smiles was more than enough to give them away.

However, he paid no attention to that as he decided to walk past them and towards the window. Noticing that Stan, Pashmina and Sandy were following him but were not objecting to his proximity towards the squared glass, he treaded to the end of the hallway and looked out the window.

It wasn't as big as Pashmina had made it sound, but it was still a fairly big cherry blossom that looked out of place in the French, red, green and yellow chaparral.

"It's—just a tree," he finally admitted, placing a hand over his chin and thinking aloud.

"Chhhhhhyeahhh!" Stan laughed nervously, looking over at the two girls to give him some support. Sandy looked down to her feet and slouched, though she did her best to put on a bittersweet look.

Pashmina also smiled, albeit forcefully as she spoke.

"We already told you that!"

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Hamtaro spent the next few minutes looking through the little details of his wife's childhood room. She had a whole dresser dedicated to holding ribbons. They had all different colors and textures and

patterns that for a second he forgot he was in a house and instead thought he was in some sort of craft store. Bijou especially had an affinity for navy blue ribbons, as it seemed.

For some reason, there were only pictures of Bijou as a child in the room. Although the rest of the house had plenty of Bijou-based memories throughout its halls, this room seemed to be a little speck of the universe that was suspended in time.

And Hamtaro had a decent guess as to why that wasâ€¦

Which was why Hamtaro found himself sitting on Bijou's bed once again, staring at the portrait of the man with his daughter. There was no mistaking it: the girl was like a clone of her father.

He let his head fall backwards as he searched through his memories, trying his best to recall any instance where the man was mentioned.

Bijou had never mentioned him once, that he could recall at least. Hamtaro turned over and thought the situation over some more. Hamtaro didn't even know his nameâ€¦and this was definitely the first time Hamtaro had ever seen what the man looked like.

What was he like? Was he like Josie, strict and tradition-following, or was he more lax, like the picture with him and Bijou depicted?

In fact, all he really know about his late father-in-law was that he died when Bijou was four years old.

Losing a parent at that ageâ€¦it must be difficult, he thought as his eyes shut tightly. He assumed the emotional trauma (as Bijou was weighed with truckloads of it), was enough for the girl to never tell him about it.

With his only half-right thoughts clouding his mind, he once again fell asleep.

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Hamtaro didn't exactly need another nap, therefore it was through fate's hand that his slumber ended up being cut short.

About forty minutes later, Hamtaro heard a giggle. At first, he shut his eyes tighter and decided not to worry too much about it. He figured someone somewhere in this massive house was having a good laugh. Good for them. However, when he heard a subsequent giggle, and then another one, and then finally a third oneâ€”all of which were in too close of a proximity to each other to be one personâ€”and he realized just how _close_ the giggles were to him, he felt the need to open his eyes.

Hanging onto the three poles of the carousel in front of him stood three miniature Bijous. Well, not exactly miniature, as they looked to be in their midteens, but still resembling his wife to such a degree that Hamtaro felt himself shoot up.

They were all dressed in winter coats and each one was wearing a

different color beret tilted artistically over her white head. They all had their hair styled in layers similar to what Hamtaro remembered Bijou's hair looking like when they were in high school. Hamtaro figured they were some tripletsâ€|then again everyone in this family seemed to look the same. They all had Josie Ribon's slate gray eyes, yet the excited smiles and giggles they revealed at Hamtaro's confusion diminished any resemblance Hamtaro saw to Jewel CEO.

The one in the middle turned to glance at the girls standing on either side of her as she put a hand over her mouth and giggled some more.

"_Il est mimi!"_

Whatever she said, the other girls giggled some more and agreed.

"_Il a de beaux yeux!" _the one on Hamtaro's right chimed in.

"_Oui, oui!"_ Hamtaro didn't quite understand why they were so excited about everything they said, but his discomfort level had risen tenfold as soon as the triplets had started speaking, so he didn't waste any more time.

"You probably can't understand meâ€|so I'm just gonna be leaving now, ok?" Hamtaro quickly moved to get off the bed, however, the triplet on the right quickly moved to block his exit from the circular mattress.

"_Non, s'il vous plait sÃ©jour?!" _she exclaimed, pouting, as she stood between two of the poles.

Just as Hamtaro thought there'd be no escape, someone was heard clearing their throat.

"_Excusez-moi,"_ the voice came, startling the three girls. Hamtaro and the triplets immediately turned towards the door to Bijou's room and saw the heiress standing there with her mother.

Hamtaro's eyes widened. He wasn't expecting to see Josie today (or perhaps it was the oddly-eerie resemblance Bijou displayed as she stood next to her mother). Bijou's hair was pulled into a ponytail, and her clothingâ€|from her coat down to the heels she woreâ€|mirrored the ones her mother had on.

Was getting her mother the Ribon-related business Bijou had alluded to?

Josie opened her mouth to say something, but anticipating the worst, the triplets quickly scurried out, pushing past the CEO and her daughter, afraid of whatever sort of lecture they may receive.

Everything happened so quickly that Hamtaro found himself looking at the two women in the doorway quizzically.

"Hmph!" Josie didn't seem to be in the mood for any nonsense, so she quickly turned on her heel and moved away. Bijou's eyes trailed after her mother for a few seconds before they drifted back to her husband.

"I'm guessing it's not the jetlag that has her in such a bad mood?" Hamtaro asked as he got off the bed.

"You know my family's big on tradition, meaning guys and girls in different rooms before they're married," Bijou reminded as she folded her hands over her chest impatiently. Hamtaro wanted to remind her that yes, they were already married, but figured arguing against her was the last thing she wanted.

"Have you even seen the room we had set up for you?"

"Huhâ€|" Hamtaro had actually forgotten about his guest bedroom. "Well I guess there's plenty of time for that later."

"That's right, because it's time for dinner," she explained tersely as she, like her mother, spun on her heel and walked out of the room.

Though she seemed upset with him, her annoyanceâ€"or was it her little pout?â€"only seemed to make Hamtaro smile as he silently followed her.

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"Your bags were already brought it," Bijou explained as she gestured to the suitcases on Hamtaro's bed. "Everyone has already unpacked, because they didn't spend most of the day napping."

Hamtaro glanced around the yellow-colored guest bedroom halfheartedly. His mind kept drifting back to Bijou, currently standing at the foot of the bed with her hands on her hips.

There was something amiss about her. At dinner as well, her smiles seemed more polished and for-show than they did genuine. Her voice, though healthy and not carrying any hints of sadness in it, was missing that "it" factor that made it Bijou. For Hamtaro, the lack of sarcasm and witty retorts was what seemed to be lacking the most.

"So," Hamtaro started as he sat down on his bed, idly putting a hand over one of his suitcases. "Those girls who were in your room earlier and were at dinnerâ€|?"

"They're from my mother's side of the family," Bijou explained, her voice a monotone. She placed a hand over her forehead as she thought, "They're my third cousins, if I remember correctly. They go to a nearby school so they live here during the academic year," she said as she walked over to the dresser where a fresh bouquet of flowers had been set up.

"They said I was cute," Hamtaro reminded smugly, watching his wife rearrange some of the flowers in the vase to an arrangement better-suited for her desires. "â€|right?"

Maybe those French lessons Josie had suggested weren't a completely horrible idea.

"They only think you're cute," Bijou explained as she turned her emerald eyes to him, twiddling a white dahlia against her nose as she did so, "because you have color in your hair. Most of the French aristocrats, well, most men in France in general, have very little to no tint in their hair. You're different so you have that alluring quality to them."

"Most men in France, hmm?" he asked as he got off the bed. He surprised Bijou when he walked over next to her and also started looking at the flower bouquet. The petals' colors were gorgeous and vibrant.

"Your father had white-hair too, right?" he asked as his eyes slowly went over to her.

If Bijou was surprised, she didn't show it. She simply turned to her side, pressing her back against the dresser as she nodded, "He did."

"What was he like?" Hamtaro inquired as Bijou buried her nose deeper into the flower she was holding. With her free hand, she pulled her ponytail out and sighed, letting her white hair form beautiful frames around her face.

"I don't like to think about that," she said softly as her head lowered inwards, more towards the flower.

At this, Hamtaro was left with more questions. Was her father's death really that traumatic that she didn't like thinking about him, or was it something else? Maybe the reason Bijou didn't like talking about him was because he was a bad father.

At first, Hamtaro immediately rejected the idea. In the picture he saw on the carousel's roof, Bijou looked thrilled to be with her father. Then again, that was a painting an artist could've been told to makeâ€|it might not have been based after a real picture at all, and Bijou could've hated her father. Maybe he was neglectfulâ€|maybe he was too absorbed in the family business like her mother wasâ€|Maybe she never got to see him and didn't remember him. It would explain why she never talked about him, and why in this whole house there were no pictures of himâ€|

Indeed, as Hamtaro watched his wife sigh, he knew he had to be right.

"I guess losing a parent is difficult when you're that young, and I'm sorry for what you had to go through," Hamtaro told her, voicing his earlier thoughts. Bijou didn't show any reaction to what he was saying, so he continued.

"Butâ€|" he stated to say cautiously, unsure of his wording, "you have a lot of people now who love you and want to make sure you do well. They're people who can give you what your father couldn't!" he said excitedly, hoping to cheer her up.

Slowly, Bijou looked up from her flower and then to Hamtaro, her eyes widening with every moment that passed.

"What my father couldn'tâ€|?" she asked quietly, her eyebrows arched in surprise.

"Yeah, like what I said, care and stuff." With every word that left his mouth, Bijou's posture seemed to stiffen and her eyes seemed to get _just_ a bit lowered. Simultaneously, with every passing second, Hamtaro suddenly wanted to take back his words more and more and more.

"You think my father couldn't give me care?" Bijou repeated, at first looking straight at Hamtaro and then slowly moving her eyes to some undisclosed location on the ground. It sounded like it was meant to be a question, but the way she said, Hamtaro felt more threatened than interrogated.

The flower she was holding had its stem snapped due to the fist forming in her hand.

Bijou let out a small, sarcastic laugh, sounding almost like she was coughing.

"My father was the most loving man I ever knew. He was passionate, brilliant, so devoted to me and my mother and our business. He took the company and raised it to a level no other CEO in the history of Ribon Jewelers has _ever_ been able to do. And he did all that while being the greatest dad a girl could ever ask for."

Right about now, Hamtaro realized he should've kept his mouth shut. Bijou's breathing was hitched and both her hands were fisted at her sides. He could see an infuriated red color smudge her otherwise pale face. Her eyes were shaking as she continued.

_Dammit!"

"So who are you to judge him when you know nothing about him?! In fact it's kinda funny that you would _ever_ say _anything_ _negative_ about him when he was twice the Ham-Human at his worst _than you'll ever be!"

Realizing she was about to cry, and not wanting Hamtaro to see it for a second, she immediately spun around and walked as quickly as she could to the door.

As Hamtaro watched the door slam shut, he realized he could've gone after her. That would certainly fix the chest pain he suddenly acquired.

However, he knew he was wrong. He said something he should've kept to himself, and right now, his wife needed time to breathe. He needed time to work on an apology.

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Hamtaro had never seen so much black before in his life.

Granted, he _was_ in a French department store standing within the tuxedo department, but still—how many versions of a simple black suit could there be?

So far, the buyer Bijou had assigned to him had made him try on four

different tuxes, not satisfied with any of them. Hamtaro wasn't worried so much about trying them on as he was when he realized he couldn't tell the difference between any of them.

"I think," Stan said, also donning a black tux, "you should try something completely different and wear a white suit."

"That's not gonna happen," Hamtaro countered, looking at his reflection in the large mirror.

"Why not, kid? It'd look cool." Hamtaro turned around to see Boss walk out of the dressing room, his brown eyes flitting between the buttons on his sleeve and Hamtaro.

"Because Mrs. Ribon actually gave Hamtaro a guideline to what his tuxedo has to look like," Oxnard enlightened. "The first rule was that it has to be black."

"It's what the buyer is for, to ensure the rules are followed." Hamtaro indicated the panicked European Ham-Human currently scouring the racks for a suit that was appropriate enough.

"Oh him?" Stan seemed appalled. "I thought he was just some guy hired to carry our bags! Sandy said the girls got someone to hold their bags! No fair!" He collapsed on the cushiony chair he was standing beside.

Hamtaro sighed and looked at the tuxedo he was currently wearing. There wasn't much to describe, as he didn't get that feeling that girls did when they just knew their dress was perfect. To be honest, he felt like a groom in every tuxedo he put on (or maybe that was because every tuxedo he has tried on thus far cost enough to be the budget for an entire wedding—he wasn't sure at this point).

This one didn't seem too different from the usual style: it was black with a shiny black lapel, with a white undershirt, a black vest and black pants. The buyer had decided that Hamtaro should wear a shiny black tie instead of a bowtie, and so that was all there was to what Hamtaro was wearing.

"Tch. No, no, no!" The buyer cried, appearing out of nowhere from behind the groom. He put a hand on his hip and the other on his well-moisturized face.

"That's all wrong! The color's too charcoal. I wanted more of a jet black for you! Ughhh!" With that said, he turned on his heel and went back into the racks.

Hamtaro stepped down from the little pedestal he'd been standing on and sighed yet again.

"Oh, I completely agree," Stan said, using a falsetto to imitate the shopper, "jet black suits you so much better, and it's completely in-season right now."

"Iâ€¦think I'm gonna go upstairs," Hamtaro explained, completely ignoring Stan.

"Is that a good idea?" Boss asked as he stood up nervously. "Bijou's picking out her dress up thereâ€¦"

"Isn't it bad luck to see her?" Oxnard reminded.

"Well, seeing how mad she is at me right now, my luck couldn't get much worse," Hamtaro explained, feigning a smile and putting his hands on the back of his head. "And I need to talk to her."

Stan rolled his eyes and wondered, _Does he even realize what he's saying half the time?_

"But you're in a fight," Boss reminded.

"We're _always_ fighting. We just have to be a bit more conscious of it now since we're supposed to be newlyweds," the orange-and-white-haired male explained. "When what's his name comes back, tell him I went to the bathroom or something."

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"I wonder what's taking Bij so long," Sandy asked as she spun around in a bridesmaid dress she had tried on. It was a beautiful shade of lime green, nearly the exact color of her eyes.

"Who cares?! We're in Paris trying on outfits that will be professionally tailored to fit us perfectly and cost more than a month's worth of rent!" Pashmina cried as she flung open the curtain to the dressing room, revealing the exact same dress Sandy was wearing just in a deeper green color.

"Pashy," Sandy started to say, her eyes a little lowered. "I thought we agreed on this color, since it's so much more festive and eye-catching."

"I know but for a fall wedding, don't you think this gorgeous jewel-tone is so much more appropriate?" Pashmina asked as she also admired her reflection in the mirror.

"No, I really think festive is better for a wedding," the dancer said, her voice getting tense.

"And I think," the brunette countered as her voice became equally as annoyed, "that richer colors make the wedding seem so much more elegant. The color you have on is better suited for an engagement party."

Both girls placed their hands on their hips and locked their eyes, trying to figure out a way to determine who was right and ultimately, which dress would be worn.

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The head seamstress normally stayed in her office, overseeing all the other, lower-ranked seamstresses as they toiled away meticulously on various brides' dresses, making sure that not a single detail was left off. On any given day, she never had to touch a piece of silk or satin or lace, unless she was critiquing another seamstress's job and

had to emphasize just how horrible it looked, which wasn't often the case.

However, when she heard that Josie Ribon, the Josie Ribon, was in the store looking for a dress for her daughter, the head seamstress was on pins and needles. Josie had asked for an appointment with her. She rearranged the papers on her desk, sprayed some perfume around her office to get in that air of expensiveness, and arranged to have some chocolate truffles sent over from a local candy shop, once hearing a rumor that the CEO liked chocolate.

"Madame," her secretary told her over the phone, "Madame Ribon has arrived!" Though the seamstress had been preparing herself, she still felt her stomach tighten all the more.

"Good, goodâ€¦send her inâ€¦"

With baited breath, the head seamstress watched as the door to her office swung open, revealing the white-haired, gray-eyed woman.

Josie carried what looked to be a small treasure box in her hands, and the seamstress knew exactly what that was.

"Josie!" the seamstress exclaimed, walking around the desk to hug the woman, but Josie quickly put a hand up, revealing she was not interested in any such affection. The CEO took her seat, and the rejected seamstress did likewise.

"So I hear your daughter is getting married! Is it to that pilot that was trying to court her last summer? The one whose parents are in the parliament?"

"Bijou's had several suitors, but her fiancÃ© is," Josie paused, choosing her words with elegance and care, "Japanese."

"Ahh, I seeâ€¦he must be some sort of technology mogul, no?" the seamstress pressed.

"You wouldn't believe it," Josie replied, ending that conversation.

"I remember adding the crystals and jewels to your wedding dress," the seamstress explained, indicating the little chest Josie held in her hands. "My mother did your mother's wedding dress, if you remember."

"That's lovely," Josie said impatiently, "but time is of the essence. Whatever dress my daughter choosesâ€¦"

She placed the chest on the desk and opened it, revealing enough crystals and diamonds that were brilliant enough to cause the seamstress to squint and plentiful enough to buy out the department store.

"I want all of these sewed onto them," Josie finished. As she saw the greedy flicker in the seamstress's eyes, she felt the need to elaborate.

"And I've counted how many crystals and diamonds there are, and I

shall count how many there are on my daughter's dress. Should there be a single crystal missing?" Josie tilted her head to the side slightly, her eyes narrowed, "Well, you remember why you're mother went into retirement a little early?"

The flicker in the seamstress's eyes immediately vanished and in its place was the icy glare of the Jewel CEO.

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Almost too scared to touch her reflection, Bijou hesitantly outstretched her hands and gently glided her fingers over the mirror's glass. Immediately, however, she pulled her hand back to herself and ran both her hands over the work of the dress she was currently wearing, unable to take her emerald eyes off it as they slid down the length of the gown.

This was only the sixth gown she had tried on, and she had heard horror stories of girls trying on well over 200 dresses to find their perfect fit. And though she wasn't expecting to find anything breathtaking, as she was admittedly doing this search a little halfheartedly because she didn't put much stock in this wedding, as soon as she saw the sales associate bring in this dress she knew she'd want to try it on at the very least.

Bijou's eyes went back to her reflection, and her posture immediately straightened. There was something about this dress that made her keep looking back at herself and smiling. It made her feel so beautiful. She suddenly lost all desire to stay in the store any longer, as it wasn't just in her mind but she felt a satisfying yet overwhelmingly amazing feeling all over as she kept staring at herself.

Bijou quickly, and almost excitedly, stepped off the pedestal and opened the door to her private dressing suite, wanting to tell the sales associate that she was done or at least wanting to show her best friends and her mother. However, as she looked down the white halls of the dressing area, she saw no one.

Slowly, the heiress closed the door and went back to the pedestal, lifting the gown as she stepped onto it.

She always knew she was to get married one day, as she was an heiress and she was expected to keep up the lineage. She had briefly thought about the types of dresses she'd want to wear. Bijou knew she wanted a big, fluffy gown, but she never had a really clear idea as to what else...until she saw herself wearing this. It just fit.

It was a strapless, sweetheart-neckline dress that was the color Bijou always associated with clouds on a day at the beach. It puffed out in just the right amount beneath her waist, giving her that majestic look that made her heart beat fast. It was made of a satin underlining and had beautiful beaded lace that ran the entire length of the dress, including the corset top which tied in the back with a white, silky ribbon. As she stood, the train of the dress, with its beautiful embroidery, trailed a good three feet behind her.

There were already some crystals sewn into certain segments on the dress's embroidery. The way the light hit them, Bijou looked like she

was wearing light-speckled snow.

The dress was just so beautiful, Bijou could feel her eyes shake with happiness. She never for a moment thought she'd find the dress of her dreams for such an impromptu wedding.

She was admiring the back of her dress when she heard the door of her dressing room open.

"Mother! I don't think I want any jewels added to this one because it's just soâ€¦"

She turned around, expecting to meet her mother's stare. However, when she saw her husband standing in the doorway, looking at her with a more dazed look than ever, she felt all her aforementioned happiness evaporate.

"â€¦beautiful," Hamtaro finished for her as he stared at the girl standing before him. He had never thought of her as being exceptionally attractive, though he felt pride as he saw her standing there looking more stunning than anything he had ever seen before. She was glowing with beauty, almost overflowing with it.

Bijou picked up her gown and walked past Hamtaro, opening the door of the dressing room.

"Get out," she ordered as he looked at her.

Hamtaro was feeling quite dejected, but he nevertheless kept his composure.

"Don't tell me you're superstitious. Need I remind you, we're already married so this doesn't technicallyâ€¦"

"I don't want to see you, get out," Bijou repeated, enunciating every word.

"I wanted to apologize," Hamtaro said quickly, noticing her rising anger and not wanting her to be any more upset than she already was.

"Ok, get out," she said once more.

"You're really overreacting to this whole thing," Hamtaro explained.

"You insulted my father. I never take that lightly," Bijou spat back, eyes sharpening.

"Well it would help if I knew something about him! You never talk about him so I just assumedâ€¦"

"You assumed what? That he was a horrible man that I never wanted to mention again? Do you have any idea how ridiculous your theory sounds?" she threw her hands up in her hair and groaned.

"I really don't think my theory was all that crazy, considering how there's no sign of him ever living in your house. I swear, sometimes I think you just budded off your mother's shoulder!" he cried back.

Bijou walked to the mirror and then turned around, visibly shaking.

"I know you've never lost a parent, but surely, somewhere in your miserable little life, you must've cared enough about somebody to have them constantly be in your thoughts, so much so that to speak about them every time you think about them would have you talking all day." It was more of a question the way she said it, and she waited for Hamtaro's reply.

"Yeah, I have," Hamtaro said almost instantaneously. The feeling Bijou just described seemed incredibly familiar, but he just couldn't think of who.

"Then you must understand, on some level, how much my father meant to me," she said softly. Hamtaro nodded.

"You loved him, and that means he had to be something pretty specialâ€|" This time it was Bijou's turn to nod as her lips curved just slightly enough to be a smile, despite the tear running down her cheek.

"He was," she agreed. "It's why I can't ask anyone to walk me down the aisle. It wouldn't feel right."

"I'm sorry," Hamtaro said.

"Apology accepted," Bijou replied.

Hamtaro then did something Bijou wasn't expecting, but it wasn't completely unwelcomed. He took both her hands and held them, and was surprised when Bijou squeezed them in return.

"We'll be standing like this, in these outfits, less than a week from now," Bijou thought aloud.

"Well, I have to get a tux that's more jet black than charcoal, but yeah," Hamtaro agreed.

"We'll be reciting our vows in front of everybody, then moving into our houseâ€|" Bijou looked to the side, and Hamtaro realized the prospect of leaving her friends was still getting to her. He decided to change the subject.

"So, you like your dress?" he probed. Bijou let go of his hands and turned to look at herself in the mirror once more.

"Yeah, a lot actually," she smiled. "I sorta don't want to wear it to our ceremony. I kind of want to wear it to when I really get married."

Bijou didn't see Hamtaro's jaw lock in the reflection.

"You already did really get married," he reminded. His voice was nowhere near as charismatic as it was a few seconds ago. Now he sounded mad. Bijou turned around.

"You know what I mean." She sounded like she was trying to pacify a three-year-old.

"We have a marriage license and DVD to prove it. You're trying on dresses, I'm wearing a tux, and we paid more for the caterer than a year of school tuition. This is a real wedding and we're in a real marriage," Hamtaro explained, sounding surprisingly annoyed.

Bijou came up to Hamtaro and lowered her voice.

"You have to stop pretending like we're in some sort of committed relationship," she explained.

"And you have to start pretending like we are, at least for the next few months," he replied in a no-nonsense tone.

"Just leave," Bijou ordered frustratedly, pointing to the door. Hamtaro had no desire to put up with her stubborn attitude, nor she with his, so this time he did as he was told.

Bijou went back to the mirror when she heard the door close. Instantly, she fell back in love with the dress. Hamtaro seemed to like it, too, she thought at the back of her mind, and her eyes subconsciously softened as she recalled this, once again running her fingers against the embroidery.

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After spending the hours of 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. in the store, getting measured, buying the tuxedos, dresses, accessories and shoes and finishing up the details with how many jewels were to be added to Bijou's dress and in what pattern, the group of Ham-Humans exhaustedly threw open the doors to the department store and walked into the streets of Paris, completely and utterly worn out.

"Can we just eat now? We're in like major need of refueling!" Stan cried as he grabbed onto the nearest street lamp for support.

"I never thought being measured and watching _other_ people get fitted could be so tiring," Boss agreed, also grabbing hold of the lamp.

"Huh. Whimps," Pashmina scoffed, with Sandy and Bijou nodding.

"You guys can go eat now, but I have to meet with my mother at Ribon Jewelers headquarters," the heiress explained. "She's making the announcement to the French Board that I'll be taking over after graduation."

Hamtaro knew why she was smirking to herself as she said this, but everyone else remained clueless or too tired to notice her facial expression.

"But, Sandy," Bijou started to say, turning to her good friend. "Doesn't that guy standing over there look sort of weird to you?" she pointed her head across the street, where a brunette young Ham-Human stood with a rose in his hands.

"Aww, that's sweet," Sandy said as she stared at the young man. "I bet this sorta stuff happens in Paris all the timeâ€¦how

romantic!"

"It's hard to tell with all the people trying to cross the street," Pashmina said as she placed a hand on Sandy's shoulder, "but with that chestnut-brown hair and that tall frame he sort of looks likeâ€|"

Sandy let out a yelp as the possibility dawned on her. If she'd been holding something, she probably would've dropped it.

"And he's walking our way," Pashmina added. Indeed, the young brunette was making a beeline for them. And as he became closer and his facial features started to become more and more visible, Sandy could feel her heartbeat get louder and louder.

"_Ooh lala_," Bijou said, also leaning in next to Sandy, in a French accent so cute her husband standing a few feet away simply smiled. Sandy's eyes were now locked with the man's, and it was almost involuntary how she started walking forward toward him.

Bijou looked pleased as Maxwell cried out, "Sandy!"

It was almost as if on cue that Sandy immediately heard her name and bolted, running right into his arms before he even finished crossing the wide street. Maxwell dropped the rose, embracing the love of his life after not seeing her for over three months.

Everyone, from Stan to Oxnard to Hamtaro to Boss to Pashmina and finally Bijou, watched the scene unfold with Sandy sniffing as she held onto him and Maxwell smiling.

"I can't believe you came to Paris and didn't tell me," Maxwell said softly. At this, Sandy pulled away from him and showed him her face, wet with tears like his shirt.

"But I thought you had exams!" Sandy exclaimed. "And I know how important those are to you!"

"I would've missed the exam if it meant seeing you," Maxwell reminded as he pulled out a napkin from his pocket and wiped her face, something he used to do when they were in elementary school.

"But just for precaution, Bijou had her mother call my deanâ€"they're good friends, apparentlyâ€"and had him reschedule my tests so I could see you," he explained. Immediately, Sandy turned around and looked at Bijou, who stood there smiling though she was biting the inside of her cheek.

"You did this?" Sandy asked, astonished.

"What kind of friend would I be if I didn't?" Bijou asked, shrugging. "I couldn't let you two be in the same city when you're normally on different sides of the planet and not let you guys be together."

Sandy ran to Bijou and embraced her, whispering, "You're the greatest friend a girl could ever have," into her hair before she let go.

"Congratulations, Hamtaro," Maxwell said as he and the orange-haired

male shook hands.

"I'm sure you know the circumstances of how this all happened," Hamtaro said, smiling, "but thank you."

Maxwell turned to Stan. "It's good to see you again, Stan."

Stan turned his head to the side and stuck his nose in the air. "_Maxwell._"

"How long do we have?" Sandy asked Bijou, then turning to Maxwell.

"We'll be leaving Paris at around ten p.m. tonight," Bijou explained. "If you could meet the limo here by then, you should be fine."

"It's only about seven hours," Sandy said sadly before her eyes immediately started to shine. "But I'll take them!"

"Come on, there's nothing like a strawberry crepe made fresh at one of my favorite restaurants," Maxwell invited, holding his hand out to Sandy.

Sandy turned to Bijou and the rest of her friends, mouthing a "Bye-bye!" to them excitedly before taking his hand and letting him lead the way.

Pashmina cried, part out of happiness, part out of realization that the only men who had ever treated her like that were Dexter and Howdy.

"I know this wasn't easy for you," Bijou suddenly heard Hamtaro's voice behind her. "But I want you to know that I'm proud of you." He put a hand on her shoulder, and just as he was about to remove it, Bijou put her own hand on top of it.

"Thank you," she said as she continued biting her cheek.

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Approximately two-and-a-half hours later, Bijou was biting her cheek for an entirely different reason.

She wasn't expecting to be this nervous as her mother made her speech, but as her mother started to build more and more thunder about her retiring in six short months, she could feel her hands get tingly with anticipation.

She ran her hands over her business skirt, smoothing out any wrinkles. Any second now, her mother would make the announcement to all the men and women sitting at this ridiculously long, oval table, and Bijou would have to stand up and assure everyone this was true.

"With that said," Josie said, speaking in her native French to all the members of the French Ribon Jewelers Board

Bijou's heartbeat quadrupledâ€|

"After seventeen years of serving this company with the utmost I possibly couldâ€|"

Her hands were getting clammyâ€|

"With the financial stability we have been inâ€|"

She was gonna be sick!

"I feel this is indeed the most appropriate time for me to step down, and for my daughter, the young heiress Bijou Ribonâ€|Harunaâ€|to take her rightful place as the Chief Executive Officer of Ribon Jewelers. Bijou, if you please."

Bijou stood up, albeit a little clumsily, and stayed next to her mother, overlooking the group of employees who were all twice her age. As she stared at their faces, a new set of chills took over her.

None of them looked too pleased.

"In six months, she will be the one sitting at the end of this table," Josie finished.

"This, this is an outrage!" one of the men sitting at the table cried, banging his fist against the table.

"She's just a child!" another employee, this time a female, cried out. "She knows nothing about the business world!"

"You can't possibly expect such an inexperienced kid to take over a billion-dollar corporation!"

"Are you out of your mind, Josie?"

"Areâ€|are you sick, Josie? Is that why you're doing this, because you don't have much time left?!"

"Silence," Josie cut in, ending all the indignant voices immediately. "If anyone had any specific problems with this, they can take them up with me privatelyâ€""

"But she's incompetent, Josie, in that she has no real experience running a company. This will be too much of a challenge for her," one of the female employees cut in. "Please reconsider."

The way Josie's eyes lowered and her face seemed to become tighter, Bijou'd bet her life that her mother was going to fire the employee. However, before Josie could let out another word, Bijou cut in.

"That won't be a problem," the crowned-heiress declared, imitating the look her mother had ruled the company with. "Because I love challenges."

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Sparkle sighed as she looked at the soap opera on the screen. In today's episode, two of her favorite characters were getting married.

She looked down at her pedicurist and splashed her feet in the water, trying to get the pedicurist's attention, which she successfully did.

"So what do you think? Am I wrong for thinking that Hamtaro deserves better? I mean I know I said I tried to act all cool with them being married, but when I kissed him it felt like I should be the one getting married, not Boo-Hoo!"

"You're right, Ms. Sparkle," the pedicurist said, wiping some of the foot-water off her face with a carefully managed expression on.

Satisfied with the answer, Sparkle relaxed in the comfy spa chair and smirked. "Of course I am," she said as she tilted her head back and relaxed in the luxury of her terrycloth robe. However, another thought hit her, and she immediately splashed her feet in the water again.

"What if I just want to get married, and not necessarily to Hamtaro?" "Hmm, I guess that's not a bad idea. If things with Hamtaro don't work out, I'll just find some other guy. Can't be that hard, right? And I'm sure Bijou won't mind since they're not in a 'real' marriage, you know. I hope she can accept a challenge."

Once again, the pedicurist wiped the water off her face and started to rinse Sparkle's feet.

"She won't know what hit her," Sparkle said as she leaned back into her chair again and smiled, satisfied.

"I agree," the pedicurist said aloud, internally praying for whoever these Hamtaro and Bijou were that the Pop Princess kept rambling about.

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OMG! I am so, so, soooooo very sorry for not updating since like June. But you have to understand, I was going through a bit of stuff during the summer, and of course college is completely back in-swing and I had three exams this week. It was a mini-hell.

This chapter I actually started maybe a week after I posted the previous chapter (20), but because I kept having to end to other things, this chapter kept being written in installments. Finally, today I just decided to crank out the last twelve pages and post this thing already. So yeah, this chapter took the longest time to

write.

Now for my reviewers!

****AmyAddict1-****I DO go for a lot of emotion! Thanks for noticing! :D Normally I don't get too affected, but today I admit as I was writing the Sandy and Maxwell scene I was a little caught up. Thanks for reviewing!

****Bamy the ham-ham-****Aww, your review was really sweet! Thanks for your patience and thanks for the review! (I'm glad to see I changed your mind about Ham-Human stories ;p)

****Crystalgurl101-****I'm glad you like snotty Sparkle! I think there was a ton of that in the last scene of this chapter! I'm glad you like the way Hamtaro and Bijou are bonding, as there will be a ton of it going on in the next few chapters. Thank for the review!

****Macarov-****I don't know about pacing for this story, I just sort of write what I think should come next. It just so happens that the story pans out nicely from there. Hehe. But thank you for your review. I admit, most of the minor characters are never really going to be integrated into the Hamtaro and Bijou story, so I give them little dialog here and there (which you referred to as stale, and I appreciate that since it gives me some critique!). Thanks for reviewing!

****Moonlight-Milkyway-****I can't tell you enough how much I want a Dunkin' Donuts Milkyway hot Chocolate every time I see your name. Anyway, you think the picture of Bijou's dad on her bed is creepy? Ok, maybe it is a littleâ€|but it served as a nice transition into the subplot that involves Bijou's father, which is brought up with this arc of "Petals". Thank you for the review!

****Sandyandmaxwellfanatic-****I'm hoping you liked this chapter? It was the first Sandy and Maxwell face-to-face scene in this storyâ€|it only took like three yearsâ€|I hope your arm is feeling better. If I ever lost my ipod, I'd probably burn my entire house down in the hopes of finding it, so you're not alone in ipod love! (hugs ipod) Thanks for the review!

****Shadow Bijou-****Sparkle's mostly here to stir up trouble, like you said. She's in this mindset where she originally thought it'd be fun to point out Bijou's mistake to Bijou, but now she believes she wants Hamtaro and/or a marriage, and that means taking Bijou out of the picture. Then of course, we have Roger, who I purposely left out this chapter but not for long! So yeah, there's your spoiler. I'm not sure what you thought of this chapter as it was written over the course of about four months. I'm not exactly sure how it flows, but hopefully you'll like it? If not, I'm expecting critique from youâ€|I can take it!! Thanks for reviewing!

And, as for Bijou's wedding dress, that's from a designer known as Amalia Carrara. I felt it necessary to describe her wedding gown, even though, as I've mentioned, I don't like describing clothes. I actually went looking online for a dress I thought would suit Bijou, and once I saw it, I couldn't get it out of my mind. I knew this had to be the one. The link to the dress is on my profile, as is the

dress I had in mind for Sandy and Pashminaâ€|though for those two, I couldn't find a bridesmaid dress I liked so I just picked one. That's why I didn't bother describing their bridesmaid dress. Try to imagine it in navy, since that's the color it's going to be in the story.

As always, thanks for reading, so please leave a review!

-CN

22. Trinity

So, while writing the first scene to this chapter, I kept listening to Yuki Kajiura's "Preparation". I recommend going on YouTube and playing it while you read the first part, as it really inspired me to write it the way I didâ€|and I dunnoâ€|I think it suits the scene very well.

CN

Petals

**Chapter Twenty-Two: **_Trinity_

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_Josie Ribon immediately shut the heavily-opaque curtains, her pale fingers wrapping around the thick fabric and strangling it as she shook ever-so-slightly in a cold sweat. Thankfully, shutting the curtains blocked out all the moonlight from outside, making it impossible to see Josie's stunned state. _

"_Muzzerâ€|!" Josie felt like crying. Her daughter's voice was so weak and subdued. A girl her age should never have to speak like that! Her voice should've been filled with laughter and happiness and curiosity!_

"_I'm so sorry, Bijou," Josie said as she turned around in the dark room. She immediately left the double French doors that led to Bijou's patio and sat beside her daughter's carousel-themed bed._

"_I had no idea it would rain tonight," Josie said softly, her gray eyes tender as she gently stroked the toddler's white head.

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Bijou, in response, clutched the red sheets in her small hands against her chest, burying her chin into her knees. Her eyes were puffy and even in the dim, tiny sliver of light that came in from the hallway, the tearstains were evident.

_It took all Josie had not to cry right then and there, though her

eyes shook and wouldn't stay still, despite her best efforts. _

_She had tried so hard to convince herself that this was a phase, a fear Bijou would outgrow. The moment she heard her daughter's ear-piercing screams, however, at the mere sight of a mild storm, the CEO realized that she had to seek out some professional help. Her baby would need therapy. _

"_Muzzer," Bijou whimpered, her voice slightly muffled by her covers._

Josie took a few seconds to compose her voice before she tentatively asked, "Yes, sweetheart?"

"_Muzzer, can we go back to Japan?" Bijou asked as she tilted her head, her emerald eyes shaking the same way her mother's were. Josie couldn't see her mouth, for it was covered by her sheets, but she could tell by the vibration of her bedding that the girl's mouth was shaking. She was ready to blow any second. _

_It was then that she realized just what her daughter had asked.

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_Josie's hand stopped in her daughter's hair, and her mouth fell slightly open. _

"_I don't wanna stay here anymore," Bijou admitted. _

Of course you don't_, Josie thought as she resumed stroking the girl's head. _Japan is the last place you remember having your complete family.

_They could move back from Japan to France and pretend like nothing changed, like a major part of their lives hadn't gone away and would never come back. They could live in this denial, but it would never be the same. Something would always be off. His smile would never again cheer Bijou up, and he'd never hold Josie again. This mansion was nothing without him, the third and possibly most integral part of their lives. The trinity was lost, and for Bijou, it was a loss she could not compensate for, at least not anytime in the foreseeable future. _

Bijou wanted to leave these hollow halls. She had no desire to live in a country her father had wanted to leave. She wanted to go back to that foreign place where her father opened a new branch of the company, where he said he would take their company to a whole new level.

The thought of his voice, how he said "branch" of the new company—Bijou recalled the tree that was in the backyard. That tree would stay here, in France. She immediately pushed the thought of it from her mind, for thinking about it felt like throwing salt into a wound that was far too fresh to be exposed. _

Josie realized all of this as a thousand thoughts hit her at one time. Therefore, it was in a monotone that she replied, continuously stroking her daughter's hair as she looked at her deep green eyes, her own slate eyes never moving,

"_We'll buy the tickets for Japan tomorrow morning." _

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Bijou jolted up as she realized what she had just dreamt about, another one of those countless memories of sleepless nights and having to be soothed into a state of calmness.

She shut her eyes tightly as she listened to the soft dancing of raindrops on her balcony. After realizing that wishing them away was useless, she decided to get up. Despite the cold, she left the comfort of her bed and slowly made her way to the French doors.

Sometimes, she was mesmerized by it. Other times, she hated it and backed away, as if witnessing and running from some gruesome act that she just couldn't bear to watch. Tonight, it seemed to be the former.

But she could never, ever go in it. The comfort of the window protected her from the terrors that came with it, so she leaned her head against the wall. She watched the rain pour and pour with no end, billions of drops hitting everything in sight every second.

"_There's no sign of him ever living in your house_!" Oddly enough, her husband's words from earlier that day came into her mind. As she continued to absentmindedly watch the downpour, she realized he was right, in his own, silly way. He had no idea about her fatherâ€|

_Can I trust him? _Bijou thought as she shivered in the cold. As she wrapped her arms around herself, she let herself think.

She flashbaked to when they were on the flight to Kyoto. She and Hamtaro were in the bathroom and there was turbulenceâ€|When she fell forward, he caught her.

Bijou couldn't stop focusing on the look he had in his eyes as he held her.

"I think I can," she said to no one in particular as she turned her back to the rain and headed back to her bed.

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When Hamtaro woke up the next morning, he was pleasantly surprised, oddly enough, to see his wife sitting on the foot of his bed with her knees tucked under her and staring straight at him.

As he sat up he started to rub his eyes, trying to make sure this wasn't a dream, but Bijou's voice carried into his ears, interrupting his movements.

"Hurry up and get dressedâ€|I want to show you something."

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They left through the main back door of the house, and they walked a good half-mile down a winding, paved road. At the end of the road, Hamtaro could see, was a mini-forest of beautiful dogwood trees.

"It's a shame you couldn't see the garden in the spring," Bijou said, keeping her hands tucked safely inside her white pea coat as her eyes looked over all the barren fields around her. "There are dozens of flowers in bloom, and when the wind picks up their petals and moves them around, it looks like you're watching a rainbow be blown away."

Hamtaro followed behind her, his eyes lowering at that tragically nostalgic tone to her voice.

"He used to call it colorful wind," Bijou added, her shoulders shrugging as she continued walking.

"Who did?" Though he asked the question, Hamtaro wasn't really expecting a response as she knew that he knew, or at least had an idea, of whatâ€"or whomâ€"they were going to talk about.

Ergo, Bijou didn't give an answer, but instead kept walking. Hamtaro sped up, coming directly by her side, as he gave her a smile. Weakly, she reciprocated it, though her emerald eyes immediately went back to being downcast.

There was no blue in the sky this morning. A pale gray stretched across everything towards the heavens.

They were leaving to go back to Japan later that night. Hamtaro sighed as he looked around the massive backyard, realizing that this was most likely the last time he'd ever get to see this place. Truth be told, though he had only spent about two days here, it was still a beautiful estate and it had a slight nostalgic feel to it.

Hamtaro and Bijou walked into the forest, lined with trees that were either brilliantly colored with the scenery of the chaparral or barren, early starters that foreshadowed the winter that was to come.

"A long time ago," Bijou started to say as they crunched leaves under their shoes, "there was a chapel in this yard. I never saw it, of course, since it was knocked down when my grandfather was a kid, but it was where most of the weddings for our family were heldâ€"|"

She let out a deep breath, eyes lowering softly as she added, "as well as all the funerals."

Hamtaro wanted to know what the point of this story was, however, the moment the last six words left Bijou's mouth they entered a clearing in the forest lined with beautifully-carved rocks of granite, marble, onyx and slate.

They were tombstones. Hamtaro stood still as he looked over them. There had to be at least 2 dozen stones in this area about as big as

the kitchen and living area of his apartment.

"These are some of the more recent ones," Bijou explained in a monotone, eyes flitting briefly over the remembrances of her ancestors. "There are even more if you walk a little father back."

Indeed, Hamtaro realized if he squinted and looked past the little cemetery in front of him, there was another clearing behind some more trees, and in that clearing he could barely make out the shape of a few stones jutting out of the earth.

Hamtaro looked around him, noticing all the Ribons he saw etched into the beautiful stonework. That's when he noticed something peculiar, something he spent no more than a second looking at. Among the orange, red, brown and the few green leaves, Hamtaro saw a single, tiny cherry blossom petal lying in front of his foot.

He didn't think much of it, and he looked at Bijou for further instruction. Her eyes were still lowered as she turned to her side and lead him into a patch of trees to her left.

The terrain became slightly rocky here. Bijou walked over a fallen log with ease, and walked up the slight hill. Hamtaro followed behind her, although it was almost with caution.

Bijou's body language showed no emotion. She kept her hands tucked safely into the pockets of her white coat, stepping over the grass and leaves with an almost unmoving posture, almost floating. She never really checked to make sure he was following, as Hamtaro realized that what she was taking him to was something she was often alone with.

When Hamtaro saw the tree, standing tall and vibrant against the rest of the foliage, he felt a part of him fall into the pits of his stomach. As they got closer to the cherry blossom, Bijou stopped, standing firmly in front of a building made of stone.

"My great-great grandfather, my great-grandfather, my grandfather and my father are all here," she said the second Hamtaro reached her side, reaching out and gently skirting her hands against the bronze monogram that was on the mausoleum's front gates.

It was made out of light gray stone, and had three slate gray steps that lead into it. It had gothic architecture, with an elaborately carved arch above the doorway and then a steeple with a cross on it. The building itself must've been a good fifteen feet high. The doorway was made out of two, massive wrought-iron gates that connected with the bronze monogram, shaped like a circle with the infamous Ribon 'R' carved into it. The circle's circumference had painstakingly-detailed leaves carved like vines all around the letter.

"It's a pretty amazing resting place," Hamtaro admitted, observing the structure.

The two gates were surrounded by stone angels on either side, one male on the left and one female on the right, both draped in toga-like fabrics.

"_Viens avec moi_," Bijou said, not even realizing what she said as she pushed the gates. Hamtaro used context clues to figure out she wanted him to come with her, and once again using caution, he followed her.

There was a stained glass window at the opposite end of the mausoleum. In the center of it all was a large gray island, presumably where they placed the bodies before placing them into their respective spots.

The left wall was where the bodies lay. There was a golden plaque naming all the Ribon men and their dates of birth and death. Beneath the plaques were giant, square-shaped drawers that had bronze pulls in their centers, their graves. Above the plaques were portraits of the men, and every one of them had white hair and green eyes, Hamtaro noted almost dryly despite the solemn mood around him.

Bijou walked around the island and stood at the end of the wall, staring up at the portrait of her father.

Hamtaro felt nervous. He had never had a girlfriend long enough for him to meet her parents, so this was a completely new experience, and though his father-in-law was technically _gone_, he couldn't help but feel his palms get sweaty.

"As you can tell, he died incredibly early." Bijou's voice was cracking. She knew she'd cry, but it was just really embarrassing with Hamtaro standing right there.

Hamtaro's cobalt eyes took in his name, his birthday, the day he died, and tried his best to engrave them into his memory. He knew these were important things to his wife.

"You look just like him," Hamtaro noted, looking at the man's gleaming emerald eyes and his cloud-like hair.

Bijou, despite the tears, smiled.

"Really? Everyone thinks I look like my mother," she reminded, more tears coming out as she remembered the look and smile her father always reserved for her.

"I've never seen _that_ in your mother's eyes. It's thisâ€¦|ummâ€¦|caring look, you know?" Hamtaro scratched the back of his neck nervously as he looked at Bijou. "It's exactly like the one you get."

Bijou sniffled. "Thank you." The way her eyes reflected with gratitude was all Hamtaro needed to know to realize she was being sincere.

"Are youâ€¦|I mean is this where all the heirs and heiresses will beâ€¦|ummâ€¦|" Hamtaro was uncomfortable about treading into the topic of Bijou's death, so he couldn't exactly articulate the question.

"I'm not sure," Bijou admitted. "The CEOs of the company were buried here, not their wives or childrenâ€¦|But I'm going to be CEO in a few months, so I guess I'll be the first girlâ€¦|" she trailed off in thought, not noticing Hamtaro's shocked expression until she finally

looked at him.

"What?" she asked, confused by his stunned appearance.

"Youâ€|you're going to be CEO? I thought the whole reason you agreed to pretend to be married was to get out of becoming head of your company!" he reminded.

"Right," Bijou nodded to herself, "I haven't told you." She looked at her father's portrait.

"Yesterday, when mother took me to the Paris Branch of Ribon Jewelers, I don't knowâ€|I had a sudden change of heart. Iâ€|want to show you that I can, at least for a few months."

Hamtaro wanted to ask what proving to him she could do anything was gonna prove, until he realized she was speaking to her father.

She had a steely resolve in her eyes, and Hamtaro noticed her hands were balled into fists. How could one go from hating the prospect of being CEO to suddenly wanting to show that she could, all overnight? It made no sense, even if she wanted to please her father.

Little did Hamtaro know of the blood-boiling anger Bijou had felt when one of the employees suggested that Bijou's father was foolish to think of her as competent enough for running the company. Insult her all they want, she thought, but to call her father foolish when his ideas were the reason those ungrateful hacks had a job was just unforgivable.

"So then, does that mean you want to call off the wedding, since there's no benefit in it for you?"

Bijou looked away from her father's portrait and stared at Hamtaro, his point just occurring to her.

Somewhere in between watching her mother sign the check for her dress and realizing that yes, she could tell Hamtaro the truth about her father, she realized she had started to think of this as a real wedding, something she had argued with Hamtaro over just yesterday.

"Umm, let's go outside and talk," Bijou said in an almost whisper, like she was afraid of her father overhearing their plan.

The two emerged from the mausoleum and Bijou gently closed the gates, her hand lingering on one of the rods for a second longer than necessary as she looked inside the stone building.

"How is a cherry blossom blooming at this time of year?" Hamtaro asked, looking at the massive, pink-petaled, black-barked tree.

"I'm not sure myself," Bijou explained, "or why it's so big, either, since it was planted just a few months before my father passed away," she added. "I like to talk to him here, rather than at his grave."

"I don't tell that to a lot of people," she explained, looking at him gravely, asking with her eyes for this not to get out.

Hamtaro realized with a pang of sympathy and just a bit of jealousy that Bijou was here at this very big tree a couple of days ago, and _that's_ what Stan, Pashmina and Sandy didn't want him to see. Why didn't they want to include him in their little secret?

"About the wedding," Hamtaro started, leaving a pause to let Bijou finish. In reality, he was feeling a little sore for not being told about why Bijou didn't want to be seen out here, hence why he was changing the subject.

"I guess there's no reason for me to continue with this plan," she said as she placed a finger on her lips, lost in thought.

Not this again, Hamtaro thought, panicking. Just as he was about to state his argument for why his plan was so brilliant all over again, Bijou looked up at him.

"We've already come so farâ€¦I bought my dress, paid the caterers, the florist, and Komachi of courseâ€¦"

"Don't forget the tuxes!" Hamtaro reminded. Bijou smiled.

"Right, of course those tuxesâ€¦well, we've all made it through this muchâ€¦I think we're a little in too deep at this pointâ€¦" she said as she shrugged her shoulders.

It was as if a million weights were being lifted off of Hamtaro's shoulders.

"You mean the wedding's still on?" he asked, pressing for a final answer.

"I guess," Bijou replied with a shrug of her shoulders, leaving Hamtaro elated.

Her expression, however, quickly went back to a somber visage as she stared back up at the pink branches. Her perfect emerald pupils followed the movements of the petals in the wind with a honed precision, as if staring at them would somehow bring _him_ back.

At this, Hamtaro noticed how selfish he had been. He was too wrapped up in his own scheme coming to fruition than her very real, very evident pain.

"Iâ€¦wish I could've met him," he said sincerely.

Bijou's eyes widened slightly as his words were carried to her. With her mouth falling open ever so slightly, she turned her head to him.

"I would've liked that," she said, smiling.

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When Hamtaro and Bijou returned to the mansion, their friends were in the breakfast area, crowded around a very excited strawberry-blonde Ham-Human.

"What'sâ€|?" Bijou started to ask as she started untying the belt of her white coat. However, as a teary-eyed Pashmina and a not-so-thrilled-looking Stan moved away from Sandy, Bijou got her answer as Sandy revealed her newly-adorned left hand.

"Maxwell proposed!" She exclaimed, waving the beautiful, diamond-encrusted band. "On the Eiffel Tower, too! Could it be any more perfect?!" she asked, looking around at everyone with tears of happiness swelling in her eyes.

As subtly as possible, Hamtaro averted his eyes to Bijou, thankful that everyone else was staring at Sandy's ring.

For a split-second, Bijou had a look on her face that only went noticed by him. However, that face instantly vanished, only to be replaced by an ecstatic façade.

"Oh my gosh!" Bijou cried, running over and enveloping her best friend in a hug. "That's like a dream come true for practically every girl on the planet!" she agreed. As she parted from their hug, she looked Sandy straight in the eye.

"Let me just take off my coat and then I want all the details, ok?" she asked, nodding her head. Sandy beamed and nodded in return.

With that, Bijou half-sprinted, half-power walked out of the kitchen and to the foyer, her footsteps resounding on the steps of the grand staircase.

"Congratulations, Sandy," Hamtaro added, eyeing the ring she was wearing.

"Thank you, Hamtaro!" Sandy replied as she went back to answering everyone's questions, like where Maxwell was ("Back to studying at his dorm!") and did he get down on one knee ("Yes, of course!") and was there any chance the wedding would fall apart ("Shut up, Stan!").

"I need to take my coat off, too," Hamtaro added, heading towards the staircase.

"The guest bedrooms are that way," Boss reminded, pointing to the hallway in the opposite direction.

However, Boss's information fell on deaf ears as Hamtaro was already halfway up the stairs by the time Boss finished, leaving the dark-haired Ham-Human with a smirk on his face as he sipped his juice.

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Hamtaro found Bijou, still in her coat, sitting on the edge of her circular bed with her face in her hands. With a quick glance at the sound of the door opening, Bijou buried her face deeper.

"I'm not normally this petty, and I thought I was making progress," she explained. "In high school, I had tons of boyfriends, and Sandy and Maxwell had been going out since middle school. Their

relationship never affected me before! And, andâ€¦it's not like I _like_ Maxwell or anything, it's nothing like thatâ€¦so what's going on?" she asked, in a somewhat muffled tone, as she felt the tears wet her palms.

With a sigh and lowered eyes, Hamtaro went to her and kneeled beside her,

"You know what's bothering you," he reminded. Just as he was about to put a comforting hand on her bent back, Bijou shot up, stepping off the bed.

"I'm sick of this," she spat as she practically kicked off the bed. "It's like ever since I got that phone call from Maxwell where he said he's graduating a semester early, and especially since I've come here, I just keep getting reminded of what Sandy has and I don't. I meanâ€¦a proposal atop the Eiffel Tower?! _Come on!_ It's not fairâ€¦Why does my life keep falling deeper and deeper into a lie and she just seems to get higher and higher andâ€¦andâ€¦Andâ€¦I don't want to feel this way anymore."

She held herself with one arm while the other covered her eyes, her form shaking with tears.

Still kneeling, Hamtaro felt the sudden need to go downstairs and tell Sandy to take her ring and throw it far, far away so that Bijou would never see it again, and tell everyone that no, she wasn't engaged and that stuff about Maxwell proposing was a lie. It sounded mean, but as he felt his heartbreak for the woman standing and falling apart before him, he just could not think of a better way to mend her. Of course, he could not _seriously_ ask Sandy to do that, either.

So he did the next best thing he could think of. He was pretty positive that he wouldn't alleviate any of her pain, but the distance she felt from everything at the moment was tangible, so he knew she needed some sort of contact.

Wordlessly and without her ever noticing his approaching footsteps, Hamtaro pulled Bijou into him, pressing her head against his chest and putting his own on top of her white locks.

Bijou showed no resistance. Instead she grabbed onto the lapels of his jacket and sobbed harder, shaking against his armsâ€¦"wrapped under her arms and over her backâ€¦"as he tried to contain her.

"I'm sorry," she said, eyes pressed against the wool of his coat.

"Don't be," he replied simply, eyes staring straight ahead as he knew she wouldn't want to be seen in such a state of distress.

"I don't even have a ring," she mumbled, probably not thinking he could even hear her.

But he _did_ hear her. And as her words struck him and set in, their hearts broke even further synchronously, but for entirely different reasons.

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"This necklace," Bijou breathed, her fingers flitting across the incredibly beautiful, heavy and outrageously ornate necklace her mother had just presented to her.

"Eet's probably zhee most expensive zhing we 'ave in zhee Ribon vault," Josie said as she held her daughter's hair behind her head, experimenting with possible hair styles for the girl's wedding day.

"It's beautiful," Bijou replied flatly; she didn't have any words fitting enough for such a piece.

Currently, Bijou was dressed in her wedding gown which had just arrivedâ€"fully tailored to fit her form and adorned with jewels from the companyâ€"and was trying on her complete look, from shoes to hair accessories, for her mother.

"I prefer it without the veil," Bijou told her mother as she continued stroking the diamonds on the necklace, staring at the bride in the reflection.

"Mmmmâ€|" was all Josie let out as she parted some of Bijou's hair to be in front of the heiress's shoulders.

"The invitations have all been sent out, right?" the young woman asked.

Her mother walked around her, going behind the mirror to stare at her only child.

"Zhey 'ave," she explained as she fought back a frown. Though Josie had several doubts about this marriage, Bijou seemed somewhat content, and nevertheless it was always an emotional experience for a mother to see her daughter preparing to be wed. It seemed like only yesterday her husband was holding their newborn Bijou, telling Josie that he'd rip the head off any boy that tried to ask for his daughter's hand.

Josie bit her tongue, forcing herself to keep this memory from spilling out. Reminding Bijou of the man who would normally walk her down the aisle would only drag her spirits down further, something that normally happened anyway whenever she returned here to the mansion. After all, it also seemed like just yesterday when Josie was holding her five-year-old daughter, playing music so loud that all the thunder from the storm was drowned out; all she could do that night was pray that her daughter would eventually ease out of this phaseâ€|

Bijou turned to her side, observing how she looked in this gown she adored from all angles. Josie walked back to around Bijou, straightening out some slight wrinkles that were forming in the back of her ball gown.

"_I heard rain on your wedding day will bring good luckâ€|what do you think, my dear?_" she asked in her native tongue as she looked out of the window of her walk-in closet. It was a somewhat cloudy day today, similar to what it was in Japan the day they left for France, and for

both of their sakes she wished in Japan the weather would clear in time.

"_If that's true, then I don't want that sort of luck_," Bijou responded, eyes lowering.

And seeing as how this is only supposed to last six months, I don't need any luck, either,_ she thought.

Suddenly, Bijou felt a soft weight on her head. She looked up at her reflection and noticed a stunning tiara resting atop her head, attached to a beautiful, diamond-laced veil. Josie lifted the veil off her face, folding it over her tiara and behind her head.

"I zhink eet lookz better with zhee veil," she explained, walking around her daughter once again to observe her. "But I want to zee your face."

Bijou lifted her fingers to touch the gorgeous crown, but quickly retracted her hand as if she'd get in trouble just for thinking about holding it.

"M-muzzer! Isn't zhisâ€"this _your_ tiara?" she asked hesitantly. If she recalled correctly, Josie had told Bijou that on her wedding day, her favorite piece of her attire was her lovely head piece. Bijou never believed her mother would feel her worthy enough to wear something so important to her.

"Somezhing borrowed," her mother said simply, giving her daughter the very rare smile that was especially for her.

"Muzzerâ€|" Bijou felt her eyes shake, and for once with happiness. While one of her hands was placed over her excitedly-beating heart, the other hand reached out, as if to embrace her mother.

However, as fate would have it, that was the very second that her mother's cell phone rang. Pulling it out of the pocket of her blazer, Josie gave the screen a quick glance before looking back to Bijou.

"Excusez-moi," Josie said promptly before she walked out of the closet, speaking in rapid French on the phone as she left.

Bijou sighed and couldn't help but feel her head look down. Though, she told herself that the embroidery over the skirt of her gown was the most interesting part of her day as she started to run her fingers over the bumps of the fabric.

"Don't tell Sandy, but I think your necklace looks a helluva lot better than that ring she's been showing off," a new voice said.

Startled, the heiress looked to the door of the closet and saw Boss leaning in it.

"It wasn't that obvious, was it?" Bijou asked nervously as Boss approached her.

"What, your jealousy?" Boss asked, his mouth forming a small frown as he crossed his hands over his chest.

"_Zutâ€|_" Bijou hissed as she put her hands over her eyes.

"Relax, kidâ€|ette," Boss said calmly, coining a new nickname for Bijou in the process. "I actually didn't know something was wrong with you until I saw Hamtaro chasing after you like a lost dog. It took a little while, but I figured out why you were frustrated."

"I don't want you to think that I'm normally this petty, or that I condone jealousyâ€"" Bijou started to say, but Boss put a finger over his own lips in an effort to hush the girl.

"I know why this is a little annoying for you, so don't worry. I'm not here to judge you on that, and like I said when I first got here, you look amazing. You're gonna make every girl at your wedding green with envy, including Sandy," Boss explained, "â€"No offense to Sandy, though!"

Bijou let out a weak smile, "_Merci_, Bossâ€|is that what you came here to tell me, though?" she asked, knowing that this conversation was leading up to something much more important.

Boss put a hand over his mouth in thought. He walked around Bijou, observing her dress as he did so. Bijou turned her head and shifted her body to follow his movements. What was he up to?

"Hmâ€|you really do look amazing. Almost a little _too_ amazing for a short-term wedding that has no benefits for you, don't you think?" he asked as length as he completed his 360 around Bijou.

The French girl let out a deep breath. "So Hamtaro told you about how I accepted the CEO title?"

"He did," Boss replied. "And I couldn't help but wonder why you were agreeing to this when there was nothing in it for you," he explained.

Bijou shrugged. "We're in too deep at this point, to just give everything up."

"Actually I think you've just scraped the surface so far. You're gonna get a lot deeper, in my opinion."

Bijou looked at the older man quizzically. "Bossâ€|?"

"Listen," Boss held out his hands defensively, "I don't want to see either of you get hurt, especially Hamtaro. He's my best friend."

Bijou's confused expression never wavered. "I'm not planning on hurting him, Boss." The way her voice sounded, though, her words were more questioning than assuring, something that just worried Boss more.

"I honestly think that you should just nip this thing in the butt while you still can," Boss continued. "Because I don't think you can guarantee that nobody will get hurt."

Bijou's mouth fell a little open. "Boss, I'm sorry, I'm just not following you!"

Boss sighed. "Bijou, I just don't want you to lead Hamtaro on, which is what you're doing by agreeing to all of this when there's clearly nothing for you to gain."

Almost instantly, Bijou let out a short, sweet laugh.

"Is that what this was about, Boss?" she asked as she picked up her dress and spun around. She walked to the bay window in her mother's closet, dabbing her eyes slightly with her hands, for Boss's words had induced tears of hilarity.

"To lead someone on, someone needs to have feelings for you, right?" Bijou asked, looking at the gray skies outside.

Boss stayed silent, but his eyes stiffened, something Bijou could not see with her back to him.

"So therein lies the problem with your theory," Bijou explained, though a piece of her hesitated.

_His attraction to her when she wore that outfit to work, kissing her in their office, holding her when the plane started to shake, _holding her when she felt jealous earlier that morning_—

"Besides!" Bijou quickly said, spinning around and facing Boss. Boss looked at her, though with a suspicious face.

"Hamtaro knows that I'm completely head-over-heels for someone else! He's been there to witness that every step of the way!" She reminded, her hands flailing animatedly.

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"_Six months, and then I'll be free to be with whomever I want_—"

Thousands of miles away, a handsome young Ham-Human was walking around his desk, his thoughts once again wrapped around his beautiful employee who was currently off planning her wedding to another man.

But that was ok! Because as she told Roger, that union was loveless, and in a few months she could freely be with _him_.

Idly, Roger Asayo threw his letters one by one onto his desk. Most of them involved bills for the Botanical Gardens, and some silly brochures, and then some more junky promotional offers.

One letter, however, caught him by surprise. It was the last letter in the pile, but certainly the most beautiful.

With one eyebrow arched, he opened it, a bittersweet feeling filling him as he read over the lines.

"A wedding invitation," he said to himself, falling heavily into his leather chair. With a sigh, he placed his head on the cool surface of

his desk, lightly throwing the letter aside.

Of course, this was the _last_ place he wanted to go. He was ok with the idea of her being married to someone else, but it was bad enough that he'd have to deal with these two at work every day for the next few months. The thought of them actually exchanging vows in front of hundreds of people was a completely different story, though, despite how temporary it was.

He had in set in his mind that he wouldn't go. Yes, there was no way that he'd watch this amazing girl that he couldn't get out of his head be given away to someone else. It would be pure torture.

A few minutes later, however, as his rich turquoise eyes lifted, he saw a small slip of paper sticking out of the envelope. He was expecting them to be some sort of directions to the location of the ceremony or reception, so he halfheartedly picked up the little slip. What he saw startled him.

_Sorry to send this to the Botanical Gardens' mail. I didn't know your home address, but anyway I __really__ hope you can come!_

_Love,
>Bijou R.

Written in the object of his affection's handwriting, Roger couldn't help but smile. She still signed her name with an 'R' and not an 'H', something that just made his smile grow more.

He always found it impossible to say no to her.

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"No," Bijou said to herself, stepping out of the Japanese airport later that night. Why couldn't she shake this eerie feeling she had ever since she and Boss had had their talk?

"Is it the rain?" Hamtaro asked as he quickly put his umbrella over her head.

With a semi-shocked expression on, Bijou looked at her husband as they continued walking towards the parked taxis. As she turned her eyes to the weather, she realized the raindrops that were falling around the perimeter of the umbrella.

"Umm, no that's not it," Bijou said, amazed. She was so wrapped in her own thoughts about Hamtaro that she didn't even notice the weather, something that caused her eyes to linger, widened, for a second too long on the face of her husband. She couldn't remember the last time, if ever, she could ignore precipitation.

"Then why did you just say 'no'?" he replied, looking down at her with his own slightly-damp hair.

The heiress quickly composed herself and smiled. "You need to get your ears cleaned. I didn't say anything."

Too tired to put up an argument, Hamtaro shrugged, "Whatever you say."

The two of them watched as Bijou's luggage was put into the trunk of the taxi. As Hamtaro held open the door of the taxi for Bijou to get in (Sandy and Pashmina had already gotten in), Bijou took a glance back at the airport.

With another stare at her husband, she got into the cab.

"Have a safe trip home, guys," Hamtaro said to the three girls in the taxi. And even as he closed the door, Bijou still looked at Hamtaro, awaiting the arrival of his own taxi.

For a moment, Bijou's eyes moved to Boss, standing right beside Hamtaro. He seemed to catch Bijou's eyes and they lowered.

You're gonna get a lot deeperâ€|You should just nip this thing in the butt while you still canâ€|

Bijou sat back into the ripping leather seat of the taxi.

"Is everything alright, Bij?" Sandy asked, putting her hand on Bijou's shoulder.

"It's the rain, isn't it?" Pashmina quipped sadly.

Bijou pressed her eyes together tightly as she took a shallow breath. As she felt the taxi start to move away, she finally reopened them.

"Yeahâ€|it's just the rainâ€|" she said as she put on a faint smile. She looked out the back window, seeing a bunch of orange and white on a slowly-retreating figure.

As she felt her heart sink into the pits of her stomach, it amazed her that for the first time in seventeen years, the weather on a night like this was the last thing on her mind.

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"Just when I think I'm starting to get that girl, she just starts acting more and more weird," Hamtaro said with a sigh.

"Kid-" Boss started to say, eyeing the boy with a slightly-saddened expression on his face. A ringing interrupted the two of them.

Hamtaro pulled out a cell phone from his phone pocket.

"Hello?...Oh hey, Sparkle! What's up? Dinner? Tonight? Well I just got backâ€|umm, if you insist! Alright I'll try to come by in about ughh, does two hours sound good to you? Ok great! See you then!"

As Stan and Oxnard finally emerged from the airport with a bag full of little sunflower seed bags, Boss looked down.

"Boss, were you gonna say something?" Hamtaro asked. Boss shook his

head.

"I forgot, kid, but I'm pretty sure it wasn't important." Hamtaro nodded and continued looking at the darkening sky, waiting for the cab they called. It shouldn't have been too far away at this pointâ€¦

"So you're having dinner tonight with Sparkle?" Boss asked, which caused Stan to look up in alarm.

"Yeah," Hamtaro responded nonchalantly. "She just wants to catch up and see how things have been over the past couple of years, since she's been away and stuff."

"Oh, ok," Boss replied, thinking that if this Bijou thing wasn't working out, maybe he could ensure Hamtaro's happiness by pushing him to something else.

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Normally when I write a chapter, I just keep replaying a particular song over and over again. But the soundtrack for this chapter was everywhere! I listened to that Yuki Kajiura song for the first scene about 500 times (which I still recommend listening to when reading the first part of this chapter [check beginning author's note]), and then I listened to "Lay All Your Love on Me" (Mamma Mia) like 20 times, and then a lot of Breaking Benjamin songs (especially "Dance With The Devil"), "Breathe Into Me" (Red), and then so many others. The weird thing is, except for the first one, the songs didn't really affect the way I wrote the chapter. Normally songs have that effect on me, but today I could listen to a heavy metal song followed by songs from a musical and I thought nothing of it. That's weird for me.

That being said, this chapter took forever to writeâ€¦ughh, but it's because I've been planning so much for this fic, and this chapter needed to be written with much care.

And can you guys hear the bells? They're coming next chapter!

****Alistaire-***Nahh, this story is far from over. I hope I satisfied your Hamtaro and Bijou quench this chapter! Thanks for reviewing!

****AmyAddict1-***Hey I remember you! :D I hope finals went well for you, and thank you for your review! Good luck with next semester!

****Anditends-***You know I thought about Stan and the other boys going wild in the Ribon mansion, but then I decided to scratch that side-story. Admittedly Stan was a little quiet during this "Go to

France/Bijou's Father" arc, but he has a more important role coming up in a little while, so I decided to save his dignity and keep him from looking like a total goofus"since his upcoming role is serious. Thanks for the review!

****Cheshire69-***I think this story has made a lot of people think of Hamtaro in a different way! Lol! But thank you for your review!

****Crystalgurl101-***I'm glad the last chapter brought your spirits up! Hopefully this one did, too! I hope all the puzzling stuff about the tree was cleared up this chapter, and thanks for the review! I hope school's going good for you :D

****Laidbackguy-***Wait"when you say that you can wait for the next chapter, did that mean you didn't like the last chapter (sniffle)? :o I'm glad you liked Bijou's dress though! The link to the picture of the dress is in my profile if you'd like to see it!

****Lawliet's Angel-***To clarify: Sparkle is watching a soap opera that is sort of parallel to Hamtaro and Bijou's story. She saw her two favorite characters getting married, and she sort of felt jealous that Hamtaro and Bijou would soon undergo the same thing, ergo her trying to break them up. Thanks for your review!

****Maxwell's Girl-***I hope you liked this chapter"even though you don't seem too fond of Sandy (hmm, wonder why?). Either way, thank you for the reviews!

****Moonlight-Milkyway-***Yupp, Bijou's definitely growing, possibly acknowledging someone's feelings for her. But that doesn't mean the feelings are requited! Thank you for your review!

****PyrroNeko-***You read all of "Petals" in two days? You deserve a prize! I'm sure it's novel-length by now"hehe"I really appreciate you reviewing the story, and thank you for your compliments on the descriptions. Hopefully they were as fluid for you this chapter!

****Sandyandmaxwellfanatic-***I have a hunch you liked this chapter (hopefully). As for happy endings, I can guarantee that the characters will end up happy, or most of them will. Some of them have to learn to live and let their love go ;) Thanks for the review!

****Satu-Suzu-***Yeah, I'm glad this story is getting people interested in "Hamtaro" again. Although I deviate from the original plot to an unnatural degree, I really did love the show when I was younger so I'm glad I can write through these characters that I adored. Thank you for your review!

Thank you lovelies for your reviews! Get ready for an important chapter which won't take as long as this one did, since this one just took long in terms of planning. But everything from now on seems set in stone and we're ready to go!

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****CN****

****Petals****

****Chapter Twenty-Three: **_Effort
Justification_**

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Despite the fact that his wife was wealthy enough to buy herself a house for her and her friendsâ€"with mortgage completely paidâ€"the moment she graduated high school because she didn't want to, "Live in the dorm environment", as Hamtaro drove his car through the slightly more elite part of town, all he could feel was out of place. He frowned at this unwelcomed discomfort.

The weird part was, he had visited Sparkle plenty of times when they were in high school. Adding to that, he was always up for trying something new, and couldn't remember ever feeling so bizarre just because he was venturing into a neighborhood where every car visible in the perfectly-paved driveways cost more than most people made in five years. So why now, he thought as his car turned a corner, did something feel off?

His car passed the turn he would normally take if he was going to the mansion where Bijou spent her Japanese childhood, and though he didn't realize it, his face seemed to scrunch up just a tad bit more.

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Bijou looked absently at her phone again and then, for the fifth time that night, threw it to her side and let her head collapse on the pillow.

Why couldn't she shake the feeling that she and her husband needed to talk? What's worse, she had this nasty feeling drifting in her stomach that she would leave him heartbroken.

Bijou shook her head and sighed as she turned around and pressed the side of her face against her pillow.

I'm just letting Boss's stupid words get to me, she told herself. _How_ many boyfriends had she had in high school? She was well-aware by this point that if a guy liked her, she would know. It was a no-brainer.

She started to drum her fingers against the surface of the bed. Perhaps it would be best for everyone involved to just not go through

with this weddingâ€|?

The French heiress groaned again. She had just promised Hamtaro this morning that she would continue with the plan without any complaints. She couldn't keep leading him on and then changing her mind.

"No!" Bijou immediately shot up. _That_ was really poor wording. She wasn't leading anyone on!

The French girl stared down at her bedding and let her shoulders slouch. Every time, every single time, she thought her life was gaining some stability, some fresh air, something always snuck up behind her and tried to drown her even deeper in some new worry. Two months ago, she never would have had to worry about Hamtaro Haruna falling in love with her!

She really hoped all this hype around him wasn't true. She was never particularly good with letting people down.

And that's when the thunder flashed.

Bijou shuddered out of habit, though as her attention went to the branches scraping at her window, another curious thought started picking at her mind.

When had a boy ever been able to help her forgetâ€|_that_?

"Bij!"

Bijou immediately turned out in time to see Sandy walk into her room, her cell phone pressed against her shoulder. The strawberry-blonde had been on the phone since they returned from France, crying with excitement at her and Maxwell's engagement. Bijou was obviously not fond of hearing the girl's elation ring through the halls of their house, but she had no desire to ruin Sandy's happiness.

"Shut up! I'm gonna tell her right now, ok?!" Bijou looked confused as Sandy spoke into the phone.

"Ok, okâ€"so apparentlyâ€"_shut up, Stan!_â€"Hamtaro's going to have dinner with Sparkle tonight," Sandy said exasperatedly. Sandy didn't think the news would actually affect Bijou, but as the French girl's face took on an expression of pure shock, Sandy started getting worried.

"Oh my god, you were right, Stan! I'll call you back!" with that said, Sandy promptly turned off her phone and sat down on Bijou's bed.

"Bijâ€|what's wrong?" she asked worriedly, grabbing Bijou's hand in her own.

Bijou looked down. She had no idea if she should continue this act of being ok when clearly she was not. The problem was, Sandy had been so happy today and she didn't want to crush the girl's spirits. Another teeny problem was that Bijou couldn't quite figure out _why_ she was so upset at this news to begin with!

"Iâ€|ummâ€|Sparkle!" she finally said as she looked at Sandy. "She

really likes Hamtaro, doesn't she? She kissed him right before we went to France, remember?"

"Yeah, I do," Sandy said quietly. "Did thatâ€¦_bother_ you, Bij?"

"No!" Bijou quickly added, looking Sandy straight in the eye and nodding. "I just think Sparkle would be the perfect girl to help Hamtaro move onâ€¦"

Another flash of thunder lit up the room. Sandy's look became a little stern.

"Move on from what, Bijou?"

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"It's so nice to see you again after all this time, Mr. Haruna," the valet said as he took Hamtaro's keys. Hamtaro sighed, his breath coming out in a puff of air on this cold, rainy night. He hadn't visited Sparkle's mansion in nearly two yearsâ€¦"ever since she left to go on her world tour. Before then, he had been quite the frequent visitor.

"Yeah, it kind of brings back old memories," he replied absentmindedly, staring at the beautiful mansion. "Oh waitâ€¦" he looked at the valet just as he started getting into the car. "Don't take my car too far! We're going out to dinner!"

"Actually, Mr. Haruna, Miss Sparkle has asked us to setup a table for you in the solarium," The valet responded as he got into the car.

So we're eating here? Hamtaro thought, a little confused, as he stuffed his hands inside his coat pockets and made his way up to the front door. The doormen opened the two doors for him and ushered him in.

Hamtaro looked around the grand foyer of Sparkle's mansion. It was decorated in earthy tones of stunning brown marble mosaics, very much unlike Bijou's French manor which was bright with yellow tones meant to reflect the European countryside.

He wondered what his frustratingly cute wife was up to at that very momentâ€¦

"Ahh, Hamtaro! I'm so glad you could make it!" Hamtaro looked up and his eyes widened.

Sparkle, who normally wore her hair in two curly puffs on either side of her head, had her hair straightened and parted beautifully on her face. Her blue eyes were narrowed with the perfect angle of seduction. The strapless rich, red gown she wore had a sweetheart top which accentuated her bust as the rest of the gown flowed away from her body like a Greek goddess. She wore a silver shawl on her elbows.

Hamtaro and Sparkle's eyes remained lock as she made her way down the

staircase.

"You like?" she asked in the cutest voice she could muster, spinning to her side and batting her eyelashes just as she stepped off the last step.

"You look amazing! I feel so underdressed," Hamtaro laughed as he offered her his arm.

"Nonsense! I think you look positively dashing. Since when have you worn designer jackets?" Sparkle asked as she held onto his brachialis muscle, her fingers running up and down its length.

"You could tell?" Hamtaro asked as they walked behind the staircase and towards the solarium.

"From a mile away, love," Sparkle added as she leaned her head against his shoulder.

"Well, Bijou got this crazy idea in her head that I need to start dressing better, so she had her personal shoppers pick out all this stuff for me. I didn't think I'd like it, but I really do, to be perfectly honest. Don't tell her that, though," he explained in a voice so laced with intrinsic happiness that Sparkle's smile quickly became a frown.

"Your secret's safe," she said flatly as they entered the solarium. Hamtaro's eyes widened again.

The solarium, a beautiful, twenty-foot-tall room adorned in massive brown columns and giant terra cotta pots with gorgeous florals, had its lights dimmed so that the only glow came from the two, twin candles resting atop the table in the center of the room. Everything seemed coated by their sensual spark. The giant windows that lined the solarium had their curtains drawn, showing off the rainy night. Above them, the rain hit the glass dome like little pellets.

"This isâ€¦" Hamtaro trailed off, nervously rubbing his neck.

"Quite nice, am I right?" Sparkle asked as she walked away from him. As she went to the other side of the table, Hamtaro went behind her and pulled out the chair. Once she was seated, Hamtaro pushed her seat in and walked to the other chair located across from table.

"Very," Hamtaro agreed as he smiled at the girl.

"How was your trip to France?" Sparkle asked as she swirled the purple drink in her glass, finally bringing it to her perfectly-painted lips.

"It was alrightâ€¦ Pretty uneventful for the most part," Hamtaro added as he too took a sip of his wine. He looked to the side as he remembered the trip, recalling Bijou's carousel bed, seeing her father, helping her deal with her jealousy problems. That girl was more trouble than she was worth, but he was oddly enough habituating.

"What's so funny?" Sparkle asked, bringing the man out of his reverie.

"Huhâ€|what?" Hamtaro's attention immediately went back to the brunette before him. She resisted the urge to scoff.

"You were smiling," she added as she drummed her fingers against the white tablecloth.

"Oh, that'sâ€"it was nothing," he quipped as he smiled far too widely. Sparkle tilted her head, letting the candlelight catch her eyes.

"Dinner will be served soon. We're having matsutake gohan," she explained as she leaned forward.

"My favorite!" Hamtaro was honestly amazed. "You remembered?"

"Of course," Sparkle replied as she leaned her nimble fingers across the table to grab Hamtaro's hand.

"I've never seen anything about you that needs to change. I like the man I see sitting in front of me for all the right reasons." Her voice was low, and her face was tinted with the softest of blushes.

"Sparkleâ€|youâ€|" Hamtaro didn't know how to finish. He wasn't as naïve as he used to be, anymore. It was rather obvious what Sparkle was trying to tell him. He looked down, his face also turning red, until Sparkle's hand squeezed his.

"I've really missed you," she added with a pout. "We were really close, and these past couple of years haven't been the same without having you around."

Hamtaro finally looked up at the girl whose eyes reflected nothing but sincerity.

"I've missed you too, Sparkle."

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Nothing seemed right.

Bijou felt uneasy at the thought of Hamtaro having feelings for her, yet the thought of him with another girl made matters worse.

No! She cried in her mind as she turned on her bed, smashing her cheek against the pillow. She hadn't felt this way ever, and now all of a sudden, after hearing Boss's stupid warning, she started getting nervous. This wasn't how she actually felt, and deep down in her heart, she was very clear about that.

But in the meantime, her night was haunted with scenarios of Sparkle and Hamtaro.

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"You don't have to lie to me, you know," Sparkle said quietly as she stood beside Hamtaro. The man didn't look at her, but continued to look at the black sky outside, letting the only noise around them be the thrashing rain.

"You know about the wedding," Hamtaro sighed, taking a sip from the glass of his grape-colored drink.

"I know well enough that Frenchie isn't exactly your type, something you made a little obvious over the pastâ€¦I dunnoâ€¦forever?" Sparkle looked at him from the corner of her eyes and sighed as well.

"Do you really think thatâ€¦that Bijou's not my type?" Hamtaro asked, almost defensively, as he turned to her.

Sparkle was a little taken back by his passion. "Well yeah! You two have never really gotten along!" she reminded. However, the way Hamtaro's head fell showed her that this was clearly not the answer he wanted to hear.

"What if I've just never taken the time to know her?" he asked quietly, so low that Sparkle couldn't be sure of exactly what she heard.

Hamtaro was just _so_ sure that he had just begun to scrape the surface of this multi-layered girl. As frustrating as the process became, he wanted to dig further and further. She was the puzzle he had an innate feeling he was meant to solve, no one else. Was it so wrong to want to get to know someone that badly?

"Boss said she and I come from two completely different worlds, so I shouldn't try to see if we're compatible. It'll be an instant failure, according to him." Hamtaro almost smiled. "Maybe I _am_ _just_ being silly."

"I don't think it's a matter of coming from two different worlds at all," Sparkle admitted, putting her hand on his shoulder. "Look at you and me. If _she_ can't see that, then _she's_ the silly one."

Because she felt her little heart grow three times its size at the sight of Hamtaro in such pain, Sparkle felt there was only one thing she could do.

She leaned up and kissed Hamtaro with such passion and fervor, he dropped his glass with a crash and let the wine spill all over the mosaic floor.

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"Well, the storm's only getting worse," Sparkle noted as they stood on the front porch of the mansion. "And frankly, you look a little buzzed."

"It's only a ten minute drive back to my apartment," Hamtaro reminded. "Besides, I have to get up early tomorrow and go with-" he paused, "I have to get up pretty early and it's already very late."

"Which is all the more reason you should spend the night," Sparkle

added as she ran her fingers up and down his arm. Hamtaro blushed, and Sparkle couldn't help but giggle.

"I meant in your own room. You really shouldn't be out there tonight," she explained. Hamtaro sighed. The valet was right there, but it was quite true that the weather's wrath wasn't loosening anytime soon.

"Are you coming?" Sparkle asked as she turned around, standing in the doorway of the mansion.

Hamtaro paused as he continued looking out on the monstrous sky. He turned towards Sparkle, causing the girl to beam.

"I'll ask the maids to set out some sleeping clothes for you," she said as the two of them ascended the staircase. Hamtaro stayed quiet as Sparkle continued speaking.

"I'm so glad you decided to stay. I would've worried myself to death if you actually drove tonight!" she explained as they reached the landing.

Hamtaro looked down at his feet before finally looking Sparkle in the eyes. "Thank you, Sparkle."

Sparkle wrung her hands nervously. "Of course, love. The guest bedrooms are that way." She nodded in the direction opposite of where she was going. Hamtaro nodded and started walking down the hallway, whenâ€

"Sparkle?"

The girl stopped, a little amazed to see Hamtaro walking out of the hallway. Hamtaro came up to her and kissed her on the cheek, letting his face nuzzle the side of her neck for a few seconds longer than necessary. He let out a soft, "Thank you," before he turned around and walked away, leaving the pop sensation in a daze.

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When Bijou opened the door the next morning, she was a little relieved to see her husband standing there.

"Are you ready?" he asked her. Bijou nodded.

"Let me just get my purse."

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"I can't believe you call me a spoiled heir," Bijou reminded as she leaned her elbow against the side of the passenger door.

"I didn't inherit a house just for turning eighteen," she explained.

"Yeah, well, you didn't need to inherit a house since you bought one

as soon as we graduated high school," Hamtaro said quickly, giving her a quick smile before returning his gaze to the road.

"How far away is this house, anyway, from the university?" Bijou asked. She couldn't believe she was going to live in this house in a few, short days and she hadn't even seen it!

"About twenty minutes north of the campusâ€|"

Bijou's shoulders slouched. "That means it's around forty-five minutes from my house!" she looked down, the distance that would come between her and Sandy and Pashmina just now settling in.

"You'll be fine. You can call them all you want, savvy?" Hamtaro asked. Bijou nodded.

"And here we areâ€|"

Bijou looked up to see Hamtaro turn off a suburban road and drive a few seconds into a clearing of trees. Just inside the sparse foliage, Bijou saw a beautiful wooden house. It looked big, not like a mansion, but it certainly had at least four bedrooms from the looks of it.

"It's a little secluded, well, just a little," Bijou said as she stepped out of the car. She turned around. She could still see the streets with ease, but they were still blocked by the trees. Not to mention, the house itself was on a small mountain of rocks. There was a steep staircase that led to the front door.

"I always liked coming here. It's quiet," he added as he stared proudly at his house.

"Quietâ€|" Bijou sighed. Would that be the word she would, in the future, use to describe the next six months of her life?

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Bijou walked through the house, examining the beautiful kitchen whose view looked out on the entire neighborhood, the four bedrooms, the massive basement, very much surprised by the size of all the rooms. The walls echoed with her footsteps against the wooden floors.

"I figured I'd live in the master bedroom, and you could take one of the spares," Hamtaro said as he stepped out of one of the rooms with his hands folded behind his head.

Bijou blinked. "Why do you get the master bedroom?"

"Uhh, because it's my house?"

"Our house. We have no pre-nup," Bijou practically sang as she sat down on one of the steps leading to the second story.

"About that," Hamtaro said as he sat down next to her. "I want you to know that when we divorce, I don't want your money. This isn't some sort of get rich quick scheme for me," he said as he bowed his head with a sigh.

"I know that." Hamtaro looked up when he felt her gentle touch on his shoulder. Her eyes were softened and she was smiling at him.

"You're not the kind of guy who'd do that. Yeah, you can be really annoying and pretty rude and you used to be a complete jerk to me, but you were never the really mean kind of guy. In fact, you're pretty silly, now that I think about itâ€¦" Bijou turned her head to the side and smiled.

Hamtaro looked away, his mouth falling a little open.

"I'm not silly," he said quickly, practically jumping off the stairs and walking away.

Bijou looked on, her own face full of confusion now as her husband walked away. "Wait!"

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Hamtaro pulled at his collar as he got out of the house, cursing the post-storm humidity for making the weather so balmy.

"Are we done looking around? I just wanna go home and get out of these clothes," he told Bijou with a snap as he heard her close the door behind her.

"Yeah I guess," Bijou said quietly. Hamtaro turned around and locked the door, giving Bijou a good view of his shirt collar. The girl's eyes widened as she saw a small, barely visible smudge of pink on the white fabric.

Hamtaro turned back around and descended the stairs, headed for his car.

"Wereâ€¦were you wearing that shirt last night?" Bijou asked as she sped up to catch up with him.

"Yeah," Hamtaro said nonchalantly as he got into his car. Bijou paused before she got into the car.

"Andâ€¦why are you still wearing it? That's gross," she said, though she added the last part as an attempt to play out her shaken up feelings as an insult.

"I haven't had a chance to go home since last night," he explained as he put the key into the ignition.

Bijou's hands fumbled as she tried to buckle her seatbelt. She kept her head down, not wanting him to see her face look soâ€¦for lack of a better word, hurt.

"Well, where were you?" she asked quietly, still looking down, even though she already knew the answer to the question.

"Aren't you Little Miss Twenty Questions today?" Hamtaro said, almost angrily, Bijou noted, as he turned his head and started reversing out of the driveway.

Bijou turned her face to the side and clamped a hand over her mouth.

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"And where were you?" Stan asked the second Hamtaro got into the apartment.

"Not now," Hamtaro practically hissed as he stormed off into his room with a slamming of his door.

"I can't believe him!" Stan exclaimed as he turned around, pointing a finger at Boss. "He goes out all night and doesn't even call! I was worried sick!"

"You're not his mom," Boss reminded, looking quite unfazed. He continued flipping through the channels with the smallest of smirks on his face.

"This isn't funny, Boss," Stan took the remote out of the older man's hands and pointed it at Boss threateningly. "Hamtaro's married to another girl!!"

"That he doesn't love, nor does she love him," Boss countered, his anger surfacing through his words as he stood up. "Let the kid find some happiness! Besides, haven't you always had a thing for Bijou yourself?" Boss said, annoyed, as he snatched the remote back from Stan.

"Ha!" Stan laughed. "_You_ were the one head over heels for her in high school. If I remember correctly, the reason you didn't tell Hamtaro was because you knew he liked her, all those years ago! This isn't some new development," Stan reminded, however, at that very moment a thought hit him.

"You're not jealous, are you, Boss?" Stan asked slowly, his face scrunching.

Boss was completely taken back. "Of course not!"

"You are, aren't you?" Stan shook his head. "You can't tell Hamtaro, you know that, right?"

"There's nothing to tell," Boss snapped, grabbing his jacket from the couch and walking away.

"Yeah, you better believe that! If it's not Hamtaro, then she's in love with that Roger guy! There's no chance!" Stan cried after Boss. After Boss left, Stan sat down on the couch and grabbed his hair into his fists.

This just became a dodecahedron of love.

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Hamtaro lay on his bed, so frustrated that he could feel himself on the verge of some sort of breakdown. He didn't like being rude to her, and he hated taking out his anger on her, especially when this really wasn't her fault, but he felt cornered whenever he was around her. He felt cornered but thrilled at the same time. It was a difficult experience.

"That he doesn't love, nor does she love him." Hamtaro groaned. Why were Boss and Stan talking about this? He leaned over and grabbed the remote to his music playing system. He turned it on, not even caring what song was on as long as it was loud.

This wasn't fair. He didn't have these feelings a few weeks ago—and what's worse, they were growing at a rate that was far too fast for him to catch up. He felt weak, but he couldn't do this for much longer. He couldn't let Bijou keep believing that they had a platonic relationship when the fact was, he was far past the point of merely wanting her friendship.

The song stopped somewhere just as he let his thoughts get more and more involved around his white-haired wife. In the couple of seconds it took for the next song to play, all Hamtaro heard was:

"_she's in love with that Roger guy_!!"

Hamtaro sighed as he turned on his side. He just kept getting more and more signs from the universe that this was never meant to be.

So maybe I need another sign, he thought frustratingly.

At that very second, Hamtaro's phone rang.

He grabbed the device, looking at the screen for a few seconds before responding, "Hey, Sparkle."

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Sandy and Pashmina looked at their gowns begrudgingly in the mirror. Sandy still pined after the lime-green version and Pashmina still longed for the deep turquoise color of the gown, yet they supposed they had to make do.

"I can't believe Bij went with Navy Blue instead of Lime Green," Sandy pouted as she looked in the mirror. "This color really does nothing for my skin tone!"

"Well you can have all the Lime Green bridesmaids' dresses you want at _your_ wedding," Pashmina replied in an equally disheartened voice. A thought hit her.

"_Cats_, I'm now officially the only single one out of the three of us," she realized as she put a hand up to her mouth. "This must be fixed instantly!"

"In a few months, I'll be single again," Bijou reminded as she pushed back the curtain, stepping out of the tailor's dressing room.

All thoughts of dress colors and being single disappeared from the girls' minds as they saw the heiress, so lovely and beautiful, in her now fully-altered dress. The light hit the jewels of her dress so perfectly and in all the right places, like every diamond in the bulk of the gown was placed there meticulously to give her emerald eyes that perfect shine.

"Oh Bij!" Pashmina cried, tears welling in her eyes. Bijou couldn't help but smile softly as she stared in the mirror, remembering her husband's face when he first saw her wearing that dress. She wondered what he'd think of it now in its complete form.

The tailor came behind Bijou and placed Bijou's veil over her head, framing her white locks in a net of jeweled purity.

"I don't think I've ever seen a prettier bride," Sandy beamed as she saw the girl's completed bridal look.

"A month ago," Bijou started, running her hands down the length of the gown's top, "I would've never thought I'd be doing this" at least not so soon.

"It's hard to believe it was less than a month ago that you were stuck in that cave-in," Pashmina mused. She didn't see Bijou's eyes widen as she continued listing what had happened. "And then you got that job, went on that trip, got married"

"The cave-in!!" Bijou looked down, barely mouthing the words to herself as her hand covered her mouth.

"What's wrong?" Sandy asked just as Pashmina turned around, realizing that while she been talking, Bijou's situation just got a little worse. Sandy shrugged as Bijou stepped off the platform she had been standing on. She walked over to the nearby couch, picked up her bag and quickly pulled out her phone.

"Bij, come on, what happened?!" Sandy repeated as she and Pashmina surrounded Bijou.

"The cave-in," Bijou said shakily as she haphazardly searched through her phone's list of contacts.

"What about it?" Pashmina asked, giving Sandy a look which Sandy returned with a confused shrug.

"While I was in that horrible cave-in, I missed my chemistry midterm," Bijou explained as she put the phone to her face, her eyes shaking.

A sudden realization dawned on the other two girls, though just to be sure, Pashmina nodded her head as she said, "You were supposed to make that up"

Bijou nodded as she pressed the phone farther into her face.

"Tomorrow!"

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"I think I read about this problem you have with Frenchie," Sparkle said as she took a sip of her coffee.

Hamtaro looked across the small table and gave her a puzzled look.
"Problem?"

Sparkle sighed as she looked up at the sky. Though a little cloudy after last night's thunderstorm, the humid weather was perfect for enjoying a nice, steamy cappuccino in a beautiful, open-air café. Hamtaro seemed a lot more relaxed, though Sparkle could not forget the way his eyes kept drifting to the side. He was hung up on something, and the pop singer knew exactly what that was, and she had every intention to make him forget.

"Did you forget our talk from last night already?" she responded. "About how you think you haveâ€" she leaned closer, "_feelings_ for _her_!" Sparkle resisted cringing. Just the mere thought of it made her want to gag herself with a spoon.

"My feelings are confusing on _that_ _matter_, yeah," He rubbed his neck nervously. "And you say you've read about it?"

"Yupp!" Sparkle said as she took a nearby spoon and started swooping some of the froth into the utensil. Hamtaro waited for her to continue as she slowly pulled the spoon out of her mouth.

"Going on tour for so long is stressful," Sparkle started, checking herself out in the back of the spoon. "I mean, you're away from your hometown, you go to all these different places, have to deal with all these different customs and _policies_ and it's a real hassle!"

"Okâ€|" Hamtaro didn't want to be rude, but he was not exactly seeing the connection between his "problem" with Bijou and Sparkle's tour complaints.

"So every once in a while," Sparkle looked up and shifted her eyes to the side, blushing a little, "a Pop Diva such as myself needs toâ€|you knowâ€|_see_ someone who can take that stress away."

"You mean like a psychologist?" Hamtaro asked. Sparkle looked a little angered.

"Well, technically, yes, but I prefer the term Mental Coach!" she clarified. "Anyway, they gave you a lot of these useless brochures that they expect you to read and report back to them if any of the symptomsâ€"I mean, you know, if any of the stuff listed in those stupid pamphletsâ€"describe you."

"And you think that my feelings fit one of the things in those brochures?" Hamtaro asked skeptically.

"Like a glove," Sparkle said, tilting her head in satisfaction. "It's called effort justification."

"Effort justification," Hamtaro repeated the words to himself, trying to figure out what she was trying to say. His general psychology course didn't teach him about thisâ€|

"You've only started to gain these feelings for her recently, or at least you think you have," Sparkle explained. "And this all happens to come after you turn yourself inside-out for her: Quit school, your job, change your wardrobe, fly to France, basically put your entire life on hold so that she can throw this over-the-top wedding and put on a show for her family."

"And according to effort justification, I'm gaining all these feelings for her because I believe that if I do all these things for her, I must like her?" Hamtaro asked.

"Exactly!" Sparkle cried. "It's a no-brainer once you really think about it."

Hamtaro thought about this. What Sparkle was saying surely made sense. These feelings did seem to spring up only after they had started these grandiose plans. Perhaps Sparkle really was onto somethingâ€¦

"There's gotta be a way to stop thinking like this," he finally said as he looked at Sparkle.

"Yes! You justâ€¦" Sparkle was cut off as Hamtaro's phone started ringing. Without a second thought, Hamtaro answered it as soon as he realized who was calling.

"Bijou?" he asked, not realizing the way Sparkle's hands started gripping the end of the small circular table, "The makeup midterm?? Yeah, yeah, I remember, calm down! No, it wasn't supposed to be untilâ€¦_Oh_." Hamtaro's face went pale, leading Sparkle to correctly believe that her little lunch date with the man was soon to be over.

"Ok, I'll meet you there," Hamtaro said quickly as he snapped his phone shut. As he started standing up, Sparkle looked up at him with a saccharine smile.

"Was that Frenchie?"

"Yeah, unfortunately, we both have to go talk to our chem professor like right now!" he said as he dug into his wallet and put down enough money to pay for both of their drinks.

"Well then you better hurry," Sparkle sighed as she held her cup with both hands, still keeping her smile unnaturally big.

"I'm really sorry, Sparkle," he said as he leaned down and kissed her forehead, something Sparkle liked but not enough to elevate her mood.

"The cure," Sparkle said to herself, seething, as Hamtaro walked out of earshot, "is to stop treating her as if she's the center of your world!"

And she set her cup down on the saucer so forcefully, a crack built up in the innocent cup's side.

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"I can't believe it's already been four weeks!" Bijou wrung her hands nervously as she and her husband walked into their professor's chemistry building.

"Not to mention, that midterm has stuff we've never learned in class! Remember, she told us it was supposed to be more like a semester final! There's no way we'll be ready by tomorrow!"

"Especially considering that the day after tomorrow is our wedding!" Bijou hissed, walking down the hallway with her hand over her forehead. It was a little unreal, especially considering that they were not going to have a rehearsal dinner. Everything was happening so quickly, the two of them had completely lost track of time.

"Wait, we're here," Hamtaro put a hand on his wife's shoulder just as the girl was about to walk past the room. The two of them looked nervously at the door, wondering how this would turn out.

"Are these even her office hours?" Bijou whispered. Hamtaro shrugged. The two of them simultaneously took a deep breath. Hamtaro knocked on her door.

"Come in!" Their professor, Vivian, also known as, "Auntie Viv", replied. Bijou cringed as Hamtaro opened the door.

"Oh, you two again? I thought your makeup exam wasn't until tomorrow," the woman said as she looked up from her computer. "Do sit down!"

Hamtaro and Bijou nervously exchanged glances. They both sat down across from the professor, looking uneasily down at their laps as if they were being reprimanded.

"Now what can I do for you?" Auntie Viv asked as she folded her hands under her chin.

"We were wonderingâ€"

"Professor, we really needâ€"

The two of them looked at each other again, trying to figure out who should explain their delicate situation.

"Well now obviously I cannot understand you if you speak at the same time. Miss Ribon, you may continue," their professor egged.

Bijou blushed, realizing that the woman had called her by her maiden name.

"Iâ€|ummmâ€|weâ€|" Bijou continued looking down, too embarrassed at forgetting about the exam to continue.

"Go on, dear!"

"Her name is Bijou Haruna now," Hamtaro added, almost a little defensively, the older woman realized as her attention shifted to him. Hamtaro looked to the side and regretfully put a hand over his

mouth.

"Haruna?" their professor blinked. "Isn't that your name?" she asked Hamtaro. Hamtaro nodded meekly.

Their professor had a look of realization on her face as she leaned back in her chair. "You two are married."

"The official ceremony is the day after tomorrow," Bijou said quietly, still looking down.

"Which is why we need to ask for another extension on the exam," Hamtaro said.

"Another extension?" this seemed to surprise the professor, as she sat up straight and adjusted the glasses on her nose.

"We've justâ€|barely had time to prepare along with wedding plans," Bijou admitted defeatedly, looking up pleadingly at her professor.

"I believe when you first came to me about making up the test, you two told me a ridiculous story about a clubhouse made out ofâ€|dirt?" Auntie Viv shook her head. "Was that a lie?"

"No!" the two exclaimed in unison.

"That actually happened!" Hamtaro explained.

"And were you two not aware that you were going to get married the day you told me you needed to take the test?" she asked skeptically.

"Our getting married was very spur-of-the-moment," the heiress enlightened, her face bright red.

"It's a long story," her husband added.

"Well then you two are incredibly lucky that I have the time to listen," their professor added sternly. "Now if you want me to give you an extension, I want the reason why now."

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"â€|so while I was having my final dress fitting today, I realized that tomorrow was the make-up midterm!" Bijou explained as her husband nodded. "And I called him to tell him, and we rushed over here immediately."

They had pretty much told the truth. The only little smidgen they had altered was that they were actually dating before they "eloped". They had wordlessly decided to not fill their professor in on their drunken mistake.

"I see," Auntie Viv added as she placed a finger on her lips. "So you two decided to have an impromptu wedding, and in order to please your parents, are having a large-scale ceremony."

"Pretty much, professor," Hamtaro said.

"Now, you two must understand that this is all on you," she reminded. "I gave you a very fair amount of time to prepare for the make-up, and due to your decisions, you are asking me to bend the rules."

Hamtaro and Bijou's mouths fell open. Auntie Viv was very much sounding like she'd say no!

"And frankly, I'm not entirely sure this is very fair, in fact, I'm positive it's not," she added, causing Hamtaro and Bijou to realize they would undoubtedly have to pull an all-nighter tonight and study.

"However," she finally said, earning two very excited looks from her students, "if you could present me with proof of how hard you've been working on this wedding, such as, perhaps, inviting me to said wedding, I can give you an extra week."

"An invitation?" Bijou stared blankly at her professor. "Umm, yes, of course!" she dug into her purse, pulling out an ornate white envelope.

"I'm afraid we don't have an official invitation left, though this template is identical to the one you would have received," Bijou explained as she handed the envelope across the desk to her professor.

"Ahh, this will do just fine," their professor added, briefly looking over the envelope before looking back at the two.

"Now remember, I'm giving you two another week. If you aren't prepared by then, I'm afraid there's nothing I can do. You can either take the test unprepared or accept the zero for the exam grade." Her two students stood and nodded.

It was a good thing Hamtaro and Bijou weren't planning a honeymoon.

"Thank you professor," Hamtaro said as he bowed. Bijou likewise lowered her head.

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"You won't believe it!" a girl, one of the teaching assistants in the chemistry department, cried into her phone as she turned away from Auntie Viv's room.

"I was just outside Professor Vivian's room, and I found out that Bijou Ribon's getting marriedâ€"and you'll never believe to who!"

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"I can't believe she invited herself to our wedding," Hamtaro laughed as the two of them walked out of the building.

"Who cares, it's just one more person," Bijou reminded as she walked through the campus with her husband. "We should be more thankful that she gave us another week!"

"Yeah, but that gives us a week to get married, move in to my house, and study for this insane midterm, not to mention catch up on all the other schoolwork we've been missing, and work!" Hamtaro reminded. "_Cats_, two weeks would've been so much better!"

"I think we'll manage," Bijou mused, a small part of her happy that Hamtaro was mostly out of that bitter mood he had with her this morning. "We seem to be taking all the other troubles in our life just fine."

The two of them didn't notice, as they walked through the orange, fallen leaves, how easily and fluid it was for them to think of their individual existences as one life.

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The next day was a marathon for Hamtaro and Bijou. It started at the crack of dawn for the two, each ones busy at their respective houses, dialing relatives and making sure the guests were indeed coming, that there were no direction problems, and that the caterers knew who was sitting where and what kind of meat they had ordered, or if they were a vegetarian.

Hamtaro had fallen asleep at his countertop that midnight, after making sure that his side of the family was good to go. Thankfully, Komachi had taken care of mostly all of the other details for the wedding, including Bijou's hair and makeup, the majority of the food, the décor, etc. All Hamtaro and Bijou had to do was confirm, and after dialing so many numbers that day that the number pad of his phone was engraved in the side of his face, he had collapsed.

As had Bijou, on her bed in her own home, just a few blocks away. She was dreaming of fondant and chemistry reaction mechanisms when Sandy woke her up the next morning.

"Bij," she said softly as the French girl's eyes fluttered open, "wake up! You're getting married today!"

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This chapter originally had a different title, as I had planned for this to be the wedding chapter. But then I realized I needed to add a little bit of stuff in this chapter that was pivotal to the future of this story, so I decided to move the wedding up to the next chapter, which , hopefully, you all will get to see soon!

Ok, now onto the reviews!

****Alistaire-***Very sweet! Thank you so much for your review!

****Anditends-***Oxnard is in the wedding, as are Boss and Stan. (Hamtaro has three best men!) I know you said in your last review that you like how Boss is not being the bad guy, and for that, I apologize after you've read this chapter. Boss really is not the bad guy, he's just incredibly positive that Hamtaro will have his heartbroken and wants Hamtaro to back away while he can unhurt. Stan is just twisting thatâ€|ahh, well, that shall be developed more later! Thank you for your review!

****Bluesoul-***I try to update whenever possible, but in order to give you guys the quality of writing as well as story progression that I find this fic needs, I tend to take my time. But thanks for reviewing!

****Crystalgurl101-***You like Sparkle? I'm not sure how you feel about her after this chapter. Hopefully you still think positively about her after this. Ahh, I'm trying hard for this story's only villain to be Bijou! (Try to wrap your head around that for a while xD!) Thank you for your review!

****Laidbackguy-***Whoa, you started to cry after seeing this fic was updated? If that's true, then I'm really happy my writing has that effect! Thank you so much for reading, and even more for reviewing!

****Procrastination Fairy-***Yup, I alphabetize them! I'm actually not sure why, now that I think about it. I think it's just easier for me to keep track of them that way? Anyway, thank you for reviewing!

****Sandyandmaxwellfanatic-***Maxwell and Sandy have a really big impact on the Hamtaro/Bijou relationship in the upcoming part (note: I said part, not parts, which is actually a spoiler :D). There's a reason I had Bijou be so jealous of the two, and yes, that means a whole truckload of Maxwell and Sandy coming up in the _very_ near future. Thank you for the review!

****Shadow Bijou-***Maybe I should return your review section-by-section? I can't remember if I've actually tried that approach before. I'm a little pressed for time at this very moment, since I have to upload a new story and only have a few minutes to do soâ€|First and foremost, let me just say THANK YOU for capturing everything I wanted in a review so beautifully! You're a fanfiction writer's dream reviewer, did you know that? When I first read your review, I nearly cried since you picked up everything I wanted the reader to, from the fact that in certain scenes I specifically had it not raining to how Hamtaro and Bijou's relationship has progressed! You're very right about Boss's words showing up again. I like to think I made those a very obvious red flag! Ohh, is the saying "Nip it in the bud"? My apologies, then. I've never actually had to write the phrase before, so that's completely on me. I think your last review was my favorite one ever for this story, so thank you so much once again and thank you for critiquing me! That's really what I want! Thank you so very, very much! Hopefully you liked this chapter as much as the last one!

****X00-***Thank you! I love it when reviewers tell me that they can tell I've put a lot of work into this, because frankly, I have! xD
Thank you for reviewing!

This chapter took me a while. Some of it was because I remembered I had to add certain scenes, so I cut other scenes and saved them for the next chapter (whose chapter title is, drum roll please, "Dancing the Plank").

Another reason why this chapter was taking so long was because it was written simultaneously with a new story of mine, which is about to be posted in a few minutes (in fact, after you've read this, it's probably already been uploaded). And that story is far, far from the happy, light mood of "Petals", so I had to edit a lot of this chapter to make it more light and airy instead of angsty like that other story.

So please review, and I hope you guys enjoyed!

(Don't you guys just love Sparkle?!)

-CN

24. Explanation

Explanation

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Hello everyone. I feel that I owe you all an explanationâ€"and no, before anyone even remotely thinks for one second that I've given up on my stories, I have in fact, not. There is a very good reasons why my stories have not been updated.

The upcoming chapter to "Petals" and to "Perdition" were the last ones to those stories. I was in the process of editing the roughly fifty-pager that the last chapter of "Petals" was and just tweaking a few little things for "Perdition"' 's final, 80-page long chapter.

And then my little sister stole my laptop.

Yes, you read that right. My little sister, my flesh and blood, stole my laptop which both of those stories were on. My parents' response? "Oh, well." My parents did not punish her or in any way reprimand her. She stole it because she wanted a laptop, and mines was right there so why not? Forget the fact that my essays, school work, resumes, everything was on it.

I was mad, to say the least. I had no choice but to go and buy another laptop for myself about a month ago. In that time, I will not lie, I was seething.

While I promise that these fics will have their appropriate ending, I cannot guarantee when. Aside from the obvious parental and sibling issues I have, I would have to retype all those pages (D:) and I

just don't have the energy right now. But they will be finished,
mark my words.

Until that time,

-CN

End
file.